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The Effects of Changes to Social Housing Allocation on Non-Emergency Applicants in London

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“Only Overcrowded”

The Effects of Changes to Social Housing Allocation on Non-Emergency Applicants in London

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Abstract: Since the 1980's, investment by the UK government into the construction of new social rented housing has dwindled significantly. As a result of Right to Buy selloffs, the demolition of aging stock, and a relative lack of replacement social new-build, the per capita supply of social rented housing has dropped to a new low. At the same time, demand for these limited properties has risen drastically, particularly in London. What social rented housing resources do remain have also been fragmented between council-administered choice-based lettings schemes and housing association waiting lists. This research has sought to examine the effects of these changes on the lives of people applying to social rented housing using semi-structured interviews with participants from housing association waiting lists. 50 housing applicants were interviewed from across London. Interviews focussed on participants' housing history, the process and outcomes of their various applications, and the effects of their continued failure to gain entry into social rented housing. Findings indicate participants to be fundamentally ignorant both of the growing scarcity of social rented housing and of the mechanics of its distribution. Many had made maladaptive decisions based on these misunderstandings. The majority of participants were overcrowded, overworked and/or occupying poor housing. Many felt that something had been taken from them, vaguely aware that earlier generations had an easier time accessing “good housing” but unable to explain why that was. Social rented housing in the United Kingdom has changed from a more widely available form of aid to an emergency program rationed only to those who are in emergency need. This would appear to have left vulnerable those who are in non-critical need. The aim of this research has been to explore that vulnerability through narrative.

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Introduction

This thesis seeks to investigate the experiences of non-emergency applicants to social rented housing in London, in response to increased scarcity of rented social dwellings and changes in the methods by which these scarce homes are allocated. To accomplish this investigation, it has sought to answer the research question: “How have changes to social rented housing provision and allocation in the last 30 years affected non-emergency Londoners’ experience of applying for social rented housing today?” The answer to this question has been sought by interviewing 50 London-based applicants to a housing association’s waiting list. Common themes emerged regarding the harm caused by long waiting times and poor housing; the benefits and detriments of rationalisation within social rented housing allocation; and the operational mechanisms of need, waiting, and choice in social housing allocation as experienced by participants themselves. Most significantly, participants were found to be broadly ignorant of the rules of social housing allocation, believing their longer-than-expected wait times were caused by disproportionate allocations to other groups, such as ethnicities, nationalities, or refugees, rather than a shortage of social rented housing more generally. Choice-based lettings and the fragmentation of social rented housing resources amongst many different organisations seem to have contributed the most to this confusion.

The purpose of this thesis is to describe the theoretical and contextual underpinnings for this research; to describe the methodology that was employed; to present findings; and to suggest the relevance of these findings to social housing in the United Kingdom. It also seeks to engage with perceptions, commonly held by

participants, of the right to good housing and how people can qualify for state assistance to that end. In its conclusion, this thesis will argue that given the harm observed, the UK should invest more in social rented housing to continue supporting non-emergency applicants. Failing this investment, the UK should work more to communicate to the public and applicants themselves about the withdrawal of that resource, and withdraw it officially rather than unofficially. Social rented housing appears to be moving from targeted social housing welfare for the lower class to a more universal approach that is supportive of the middle class, as represented by the broadening use of “affordable housing” instead of “social rented housing,” two competing terms that will be explored below. If this is to be the case, then that shift should be explicitly communicated.

Motivation

The motivation for undertaking this research arises from information gained during an interview carried out as part of an unrelated research project. During this interview, the researcher learned that the participants, an elderly couple living in Barnet, were struggling to be successfully rehoused by their housing association despite an expectation that their application for social rented housing would be straightforward. They had applied for new social rented housing, but been told that they were not a priority and so would have to wait for some time. There was a disconnect between their anticipated waiting time, which they expected to be short, and the waiting time which they were experiencing. The couple had based their expectations on previous experiences with social rented housing, which seemed logical. However, their contemporary experience was considerably worse

than their historical one, which left them feeling as though something had been taken from them: access to a resource. This was the genesis for the research presented within this thesis. To help orient the reader to the problem this thesis attempts to address, this couple's situation will be described below.

William and Alexandra live in Barnet. They are in their early 70s, have been married for over 40 years, and have lived in their current home for over 20 years. It is a ground-floor, one-bedroom home with an accessible kitchen, toilet, hallway and entrance. Both William and Alexandra were diagnosed with chronic, degenerative conditions while middle-aged and are now wheelchair users. For this reason, they were placed into an accessible social home in the 90s. Since then, William has managed to stay independent, and cares for Alexandra despite his own health problems. Alexandra has continued to decline, necessitating the progressive acquisition of additional medical equipment for her to continue living at home.

Unfortunately, the flat is not large, and the equipment has started taking up too much space. William indicates that social services has informed him that if he does not clear enough space for the home to be considered a decent environment, they will move Alexandra to a care facility against the couple's will. To make space for the medical equipment, they must dispose of some of their possessions. William discloses that this is not the first time they have done this, but actually the latest in a long line of compromises. Each time, they must divest themselves of more of their belongings to "keep the government at bay."

The home is indeed crowded. Shelves line the walls, filled with hundreds of books and DVDs, and chests and boxes take up much of the floor space containing more personal effects. Large medical apparatuses are placed throughout the room,

and take up what little space remains. Only with some difficulty are William and Alexandra able to navigate the maze-like paths that work their way through the living room. Despite the crowding, though, everything is impeccably clean and thoroughly organised. The couple are not hoarders, they are simply out of space. They are also frustrated, angry, and confused. Alexandra tells of how helpful the housing association was when they were first given the home. It was exactly what they needed, when they needed it. But for some reason, they could no longer access that kind of service. "We need a bigger home," says William, "but they can't, or won't, give it to us." He throws his hands in the air and shakes his head in frustration.

Knowing the consequences for William and Alexandra of not being allocated a larger home, the researcher could not help but question the method by which the housing association had defined them as a low priority. Without them surrendering their personal effects or moving to a larger home, the couple would be separated in the immediate future as a direct result of their insufficient housing. This appeared to be an emergency case, but was not being treated as such by the organisation's housing officers.

As an employee of the housing organisation, the researcher was fortunate to have enjoyed a close relationship with the officers responsible for William and Alexandra's case. They confided the following as an explanation for why the couple could not be housed: first, there were not enough vacancies to give homes to everyone; second, they received many applications from households that were in emergency need for housing, and they were obligated to give such applicants preferential treatment; and third, William and Alexandra's desire for a house

represented not a need, but a preference, because they could dispose of their possessions and not need to move at all. Other applicants did not have that option.

This revealed to the researcher the extreme scarcity of social rented housing in London, but also revealed a fundamental disagreement between the realities of the elderly couple and the housing officers to which they had applied for housing. The elderly couple viewed social rented housing as a resource to which they were entitled, and which should be available to them, as lower-class individuals in clear need of assistance. The housing officers viewed social rented housing as an extremely scarce resource that was to be rationed to emergency cases only, for which William and Alexandra did not qualify. In the eyes of the housing officer, it was a reasonable ask for the couple to give up their possessions rather than be housed; for the couple, that seemed completely unacceptable. There was a clear disconnect between the services expected, and those being offered.

William and Alexandra's expectations did not surprise the housing officers. They indicated that they field dozens of calls each week from new social rented housing applicants in search of immediate housing, fully expecting that assistance will be had in short order. Though the housing officers indicated that waiting times for non-emergency applicants could easily exceed five years, the researcher knew that it was the practice of these officers not to quote a specific timeframe because of the distress it caused. One of the officers was an older woman near retirement, and had been working in social rented housing for over 30 years. She said that people still felt that social rented housing worked now the way it had when she was young, when if one needed a council house one could apply at the local authority and often be housed in less than a year. This, she indicated, was no longer the way

social rented housing worked, though many people that applied were unaware of it.

Since the outset of this research, Alexandra and William have indeed failed to acquire a more spacious home, and been separated. Alexandra now resides in a skilled nursing facility while William lives alone for the first time in his life. His own health has declined rapidly since the couple ceased living together. He says that caring for Alexandra is what kept him healthy.

Proposed Contributions

This research has sought to make original contributions to the field of housing studies by complementing existing work in three specific areas: first, by exploring the effects of reducing social rented housing stock on the lived experiences of applicants to social rented housing; second, by identifying key differences between the functioning of social rented housing allocation and applicants' beliefs about this functioning; and third, by assessing the appropriateness of choice-based letting schemes in the United Kingdom from the perspective of non-emergency applicants to social rented housing.

The first of these proposed contributions is on the effects of reducing social rented housing stock in the United Kingdom. The availability of social rented housing continues to decrease because of shifts in government policy that have taken place over the last thirty years. In 1971, social renters represented 31% of all households; according to the most recent statistics available, this number fell to 17% in 2016 (Department for Communities and Local Government [DCLG] 2016). Yet even as the percentage of households in social rented housing continues to

decrease, the demand for social rented housing continues to increase. The number of households on local authority waiting lists peaked in 2012 at nearly 1.9 million before being drastically reduced by the Localism Act of 2012, which allowed local authorities to require applicants to have a local connection to be considered for social rented housing in that authority. As of 2016, there were 1.18 million households on local authority waiting lists, still a sharp rise from the 1 million households on waiting lists in 1997 (Communities and Local Government 2017), particularly given the dampening effect that the Localism Act has no doubt had on this statistic.

This research has sought to explore the effects of these changes in supply and demand on non-emergency applicants to social rented housing, because the stories of non-emergency applicants are underrepresented within social housing literature. Need has always played a role in social housing allocation in the UK, with housing being offered to applicants with higher needs first. However, in the past there has been enough social rented housing to offer lettings to non-emergency applicants as well. Interviews with non-emergency applicants participating in this research indicate that this is no longer the case; participants of this research were often told they would need to wait five years or more to be housed, if they were told a timeframe at all. Many therefore lived with friends or family, or rented privately even though they could not afford to do so. They indicated that they were overworked, overcrowded, and/or unable to lead fulfilling family lives. They felt like burdens on the family and friends with whom they lived. The housing they sometimes occupied was of very poor quality. These stories speak to a broader debate taking place within the UK regarding the nature of social rented housing and

to whom it should be provided. The conservative government has for some time pursued a housing strategy around encouraging home ownership for as many households as possible, yet this has come at a cost to lower income households which have historically relied on social rented housing. Sharing the stories of these families is the first contribution this research seeks to make.

Second, this research proposes a unique contribution to knowledge by providing an insight into applicants' understandings and misunderstandings of the rules of social rented housing allocation. The academic community that engages in social housing has not engaged significantly with the public's understanding of the rules of social housing allocation, and so this is one of the proposed contributions this thesis seeks to make. One of the most significant divergences between belief and reality that this research found was that participants still believe that social housing allocation is based on how long they have waited for a home, rather than on how much they need a home. This is an outdated and incorrect assumption. Housing organisations are legally obliged to allocate homes to preferred groups that central government has defined as most in need, not to those who have been waiting the longest. Implementation of this preference is left at the discretion of individual housing organisations, but usually takes the form of a quantitative measurement of need by points. Some points can be earned by waiting, but most are earned through undesirable living conditions. Newly available properties will be allocated to the household with the most points, which usually satisfies multiple criteria of preferred need. As new, high-need households apply for housing, they jump to the front of the queue and will receive housing before households who

have been waiting for longer. Simply waiting for housing, therefore, is not likely to be a successful strategy for entering social rented housing.

Despite this, many participants held the belief that if they waited long enough they would be allocated a socially rented home. This usually stemmed from three misunderstandings: first, an erroneous assumption that allocation methodologies had not changed from the time of their parents' or other older acquaintance's applications; second, a lack of understanding of how need is measured by the organisations to which they had applied for social rented housing; third, a lack of understanding of how their own, non-emergency needs compared to the emergency needs of other applicants. Exacerbating this confusion was the adoption of choice-based lettings schemes by most local authorities and large housing associations and the fragmentation of social rented housing resources amongst many different housing organisations. Only a few of the 50 participants of this research expressed a comprehensive understanding of how social rented housing is allocated. Though most experienced a wait time that was longer than expected, they attributed this to an influx of ethnic, national or refugee groups into the country, rather than a shortage of social rented housing more generally. Although the scapegoating of social rented housing residents is nothing new, it was interesting to observe this pattern in very people applying for social rented housing.

The third contribution to knowledge this thesis seeks to make is an insight into the appropriateness of choice-based lettings in social housing organisation allocations, from the perspective of non-emergency applicants. Choice-based lettings (CBL) seeks to introduce more applicant choice in the housing allocation process by requiring people to bid on desired properties from a web-based portal

that advertises all available vacancies. Choice-based lettings contrasts strongly with the waiting lists used by housing organisations of the past, which were criticised for assigning homes to people with relatively little choice on their part. It was adapted from the Netherlands, where it has been implemented successfully. However, it has been argued that choice-based lettings may be inappropriate for the United Kingdom. Whereas the Netherlands has developed a social housing “marketplace” model in which multiple tiers of social rented housing are available at differing costs and quality to help subsidise the system as a whole, the UK social rented housing model is more targeted assistance rather universal marketplace. Though choice is useful for people with high need, for those without high need the choice offered in a CBL scheme is actually meaningless.

Participants of this research attempted to exercise choice in choice-based lettings schemes by bidding on homes, as instructed. However, participants’ bids were always rejected because they did not have a high enough priority as measured by points of need. As Brown and King (2005) discuss, choice without power is not effective choice and may have the capacity to cause disenfranchisement, demoralisation, and other psychological harm. Some participants had been bidding on CBL schemes every week for years without effect, and it was observed that the harmful traits characterised by Brown and King were indeed exhibited by most participants. Most participants either felt that choice-based lettings were a waste of their time, gave up on them completely, or were led to believe that it offered some false hope of being allocated a home. None of these outcomes are desirable, though participants did acknowledge that for those who have a chance at being allocated a home, choice-based lettings would likely be beneficial.

Theoretical Considerations and Outcomes

As will be discussed in the literature review and methodology chapters, this thesis has taken an unorthodox approach in developing a methodology from three distinct fields: structural violence, public administration, and science, technology and society (STS). The primary methodology followed in this research is one of structural violence, by which individuals' experiences of deprivation are examined at a very fine level but related to macro-level forces that enact violence on them. As such, the data gathered was by qualitative interview, semi-structured around themes raised in the literature review. To bolster this approach at the institutional level and provide a metric against which social housing organisations can be measured on the basis of participant experience, public administration literature has been consulted. Using the work of Max Weber in particular, the "performance" of these institutions has been assessed in a systematic manner that was not possible using structural violence. However, one of the most pressing concerns in this work has been the idea of "cultural lag" between the perceived functioning and actual functioning of social rented housing allocation in the UK, and public administration seemed to leave this idea somewhat underdeveloped. To examine the effects of this cultural lag specifically, therefore, STS was considered because of the emphasis within one field of STS on examining the output of technology to identify the purpose of that technology. Interpreting participant narratives using this approach indicated that the purpose of current social rented housing

allocations is to strictly ration social rented housing stock, although this disagrees significantly with the advertised purpose of social rented housing.

Each of these distinct bodies of work have contributed to this research in a particular way and brought different strengths to bear in examining aspects of participant narrative. Although this combination is unorthodox, I hope that in this thesis it will be shown that my approach has yielded interesting results.

In addition to demonstrating the usefulness of the above fields within housing studies, this research has attempted to make a unique contribution to the field of housing studies. In particular, this investigation has been undertaken as a follow up to Brown and King's examinations of changing social rented housing allocation methods and the effect of these changes on the lives of applicants to social housing. In 2005, Brown and King wrote that choice-based letting's apparent implementation of choice might be obscuring the greater effect of scarcity in social rented housing. In 2014, Fitzpatrick and Pawson wrote that secure housing tenure might be ending in favour of "ambulance service" social housing that is very targeted at certain, defined emergency applicants only. This research has occurred in these veins, and seeks to confirm the arguments of Brown and King (2005) and Fitzpatrick and Pawson (2014). It appears that social rented housing is headed down an increasingly targeted track, but troublingly, applicants to social rented housing seem unaware of this shift in policy. In the meantime, they live in conditions that concepts of the welfare state should find disturbing.

Another theoretical consideration that this work has examined is the idea of the street level bureaucrat as described by Lipsky (2010) and Alden (2015a and 2015b). When social service resources are scarce, it is likely that bureaucrats at the

point of service delivery will limit the distribution of that resource according to potentially arbitrary rules, resulting in an uneven distribution of services. This was observed in this research, as participant narratives differed considerably depending on the social housing organisation, and individual housing officer, participants worked with during their social rented housing application process.

Key Terms

The approach taken in this research has been to explore participant experiences with different forms of social rented housing allocation and organisation. There are multiple housing terms that require some definition at the outset.

- Social Housing: “*Social housing*” is a vague term that requires some clarification. This research will use the Shelter England (2017) definition of social housing as “lettings at a low rent on a secure basis to those who are most in need or struggling with their housing costs.” Shelter goes on to state that social housing is affordable, allocated on the basis of need, owned and managed by registered providers such as local authorities and non-profit organisations, and regulated by the Homes and Communities Agency. This excludes several other forms of housing or housing tenure that also receive subsidisation from the government, but do not meet the above criteria for social housing. Two examples of “social housing” that have been excluded by the above definition are shared ownership schemes, which allow beneficiaries to purchase part of a housing association home and continue to pay rent on the

remainder; and housing benefit, by which local authorities help pay all or part of a person's private-market rent. This research will not discuss these other forms of government-subsidised housing, except for comparative purposes or when participants themselves discuss them. Rather, it will focus on *social rented housing*, which is allocated by need, provided by registered providers, and regulated by the HCA.

- **Social Rental Housing:** The terms “social housing” and “social rental [or rented] housing” are sometimes used interchangeably, as in the definition given by Shelter above. Social rented housing is rented, not sold, to a designated household usually at below market rates (or BMR). The applicants to social rented housing interviewed for this research used the phrase usually used the term “council housing” to mean “social rented housing” as in the Shelter definition, above, even if they were referring to housing rented by a housing association.
- **Social Housing Organisation:** *Social housing organisation* refers to the organisations that provide social rented housing. There are several types. The most significant social housing organisations are local authorities, arms-length management organisations (ALMOs), and housing associations. This thesis will use the term “social housing organisations” or sometimes simply “housing organisations” to refer to these organisations broadly, as a group, each of which provides social rented housing in its own way. “Social housing organisation” is inclusive of local authorities, ALMOs, and housing associations.

- **Social Housing Allocation:** *Social housing allocations* refer to the mechanisms by which social housing organisations decide to whom they should rent their vacant rental properties. The three most common are the waiting list, choice-based lettings, and emergency placement. According to the Shelter definition of social housing, allocations are based on need, but the way that this is accomplished varies significantly between organisations. These varying methods, when considered as a group, will be referred to as methods of “social housing allocation.” This thesis has sought to compare choice-based lettings to waiting lists from a non-emergency applicant’s perspective.
- **Affordable Housing:** “Affordable housing” is another catchall term used to refer to housing aimed at alleviating housing costs for households that need the assistance, but differs significantly from “social rented housing.” The DCLG (2017b) defines affordable housing as “additional housing units (or bed spaces) provided to specified eligible households whose needs are not met by the market. [It] is the sum of affordable rent, social rent, intermediate rent, shared ownership and affordable home ownership.” This term therefore coalesces many disparate types of tenure. It lumps social rented housing, which is often provided to the most economically vulnerable people, with Rent to Buy schemes, which are targeted at those who are just outside of the owner-occupier bracket and that often therefore have significant income and assets compared to those who rent socially. Likewise, it includes shared ownership schemes, which also require a household to be well-established economically to

access. An “affordably rented” homes is one which is rented privately at no more than 80% the area’s median private rate (), which in London is still a significant price and would likely be out of reach for most of the participants of this research. Those interviewed here were in search of social rented housing as defined by Shelter, above. Affordable housing, as defined here, would likely not be of sufficient assistance to them.

- Means Testing: As discussed above, social housing in the UK is allocated by need. Means-testing is one way of ensuring that a social service is allocated to those who need it by establishing a threshold of people served, generally using household income or assets as a measurement. Tullock (1983) identifies this kind of means-test as an “income test,” and ties the concept of means-testing to targeted, rather than universal social welfare (see the Literature Review). To qualify for a means-tested benefit, one must earn or own below a certain threshold. If earnings are above that threshold, an individual will be ineligible for the benefit or the amount they receive may be reduced. Some examples of means-testing in the United Kingdom are income-based job seeker’s allowance, universal credit, and housing benefit. Notably, access to social rented housing is not directly means tested, meaning there is no maximum income at which a household will no longer qualify. However, housing organisations do take into account household income when deciding to whom they should allocate social rented housing, as it may be a part of the challenges they face. Because of this, only those without sufficient income to acquire quality housing will likely qualify for social rented

housing. Though social rented housing is not directly means-tested, household income remains an important part of the allocations process.

- **Universal Welfare:** Universal welfare is one approach to social welfare that emphasises providing an equivalent social service to everyone, regardless of their level of need, income, assets, and so on (Korpi and Palme 1998). A universal social service is not means-tested, and it is available to all. Argument in favour of universal social welfare services claim that because everyone benefits from them, they will receive broader political support and therefore become more firmly established; they will help poor people more than targeted systems because they will be popular, better funded, and more stable (see Brady and Bostic 2015). Others argue that they are more costly to implement and less cost-effective at reducing quality-of-life inequalities that exist between the rich and poor (Greenstein 1991).

Targeted Welfare: Targeted welfare is the other broad categorisation of social welfare systems. Targeted welfare seeks to provide social services only to those people that need it, by establishing criteria for eligibility such as means-tests as described above (Tullock 1983). Under a system of targeted welfare, only some people will qualify for benefits. Arguments for targeted welfare claim that because more people are paying for services for fewer people, it is more cost effective at alleviating inequality. Arguments against targeted welfare claim that because relatively few people benefit from “the system” than pay into it through taxes, they prove unpopular and therefore struggle to obtain and maintain funding and support (Korpi 1983).

Each welfare state decides differently which services will be targeted, which will be universal, and how either system is implemented.

Thesis Organisation

This research asks the question “How have changes to social rented housing provision and allocation in the last 30 years affected non-emergency Londoners’ experience of applying for social rented housing today?” To answer this question, this thesis will be organised as follows:

Chapter 1 will discuss the elements of the social housing crisis, how social rented housing in the UK sits with the debate about targeted versus universal social welfare, and the literatures applied to the research question to help frame the investigation carried out for this research. The three most significant elements of the social housing crisis are increasing scarcity of social lettings, increasing fragmentation of social rented housing resources amongst different organisations, and growing competitiveness in the private rental market. To these problems, this research has applied theories from three academic disciplines in addition to considerations from housing literature itself. Anthropological engagements with “structural violence” have been useful for communicating the lived experience of participants and the suffering they endure, as well as placing those experiences into a historical context which participants themselves lacked. Public administration has been useful for examining the benefits and detriments of the rationalisation that has come to dominate social rented housing allocations. Science, Technology, and Society has been useful for viewing social housing allocations as a societal technology, and using participant narrative to identify the purposes of that

technology in practice as a way to explore ideas of cultural lag. Each of these perspectives offers a novel approach to social housing research that is undertaken here with non-emergency applicants, a group that goes underrepresented in social housing literature.

Engagement in these literatures while considering the primary research question described above, and relating them to housing studies, led to the development of the following sub-questions:

- How do applicants experience the mechanisms of social rented housing allocation?
- What are the positive and negative aspects of rationalisation experienced by applicants to UK social rented housing today?
- Have reductions in the supply of social rented housing and changes to social rented housing allocation harmed those seeking social rented housing, and if so how?

Chapter 2 will define the methodology that this research used in gathering and analysing data to answer the above questions, as well as the primary research question, “how have changes to social rented housing provision and allocation in the last 30 years affected non-emergency Londoners’ experience of applying for social rented housing today?” This project has sought to gain an insight into the experience of non-preferred applicants to social rented housing in their dealings with the allocation systems. To achieve this, 50 London-based individuals were recruited through the waiting list of a national housing association. They were interviewed using semi-structured methods to obtain their housing history, living conditions, experiences with applying to social rented housing, and knowledge

about the allocation process. Questions were designed to capture as much narrative as possible, therefore topics discussed varied considerably between participants. Interviews were then transcribed, coded, and analysed.

Chapter 3 is the first of four empirical chapters discussing the findings of this research, and focusses on the living conditions of participants in answer to the research question “Have reductions in the supply of social rented housing and changes to social rented housing allocation harmed those seeking social rented housing, and if so how?” Because of their failure to gain social rented housing, many participants suffered from overcrowding, being overworked, unable to lead a fulfilling family life, or living in low quality housing. This chapter makes use of structural violence to connect the poor living conditions of individual participants to the socio-economic changes that have made these conditions a logical outcome of social rented housing reductions. One of the purposes of structural violence is to advocate for underrepresented groups by communicating their narratives to a wider audience; the communication of poor living conditions is the purpose of this chapter.

Chapter 4 seeks to investigate feelings of victimisation on the part of participants, answering another theme that developed within the question “have reductions in the supply of social rented housing and changes to social rented housing allocation harmed those seeking social rented housing, and if so how?” This chapter also makes use of structural violence by seeking to connect individual narratives of systemic violence against participants’ abilities to meet their needs to historical trends of social rented housing reduction that make such violence a likely outcome. Participants felt victimised by their continued failure to gain social rented

housing, not by an individual but by an entire system. They felt victimised because of the long wait, because of the urgent needs they had while waiting, and because they felt tormented by the perceived burden they placed on friends and family with whom they lived while waiting. Participants did indeed view themselves as victims, and though there appeared to be evidence that this was the case, there was also evidence that they sabotaged themselves, often through ignorance of the rules of social housing allocation or insistence on being housed in a certain locality.

Chapter 5 explores the benefits and detriments of rationalisation within social housing allocation as experienced by participating applicants, in answer to the research question “what are the positive and negative aspects of rationalisation experienced by applicants to UK social rented housing today?” It applies many of the guidelines developed in public administration in doing so, and draws significantly upon the work of Max Weber. Interviewees indicated that there were indeed many positive and negative elements of rationalisation in the social rented housing application process. Benefits included objectivity, consistency within most organisations, and transparency within some organisations. Detriments included a lack of consistency in allocation policy between different organisations, a lack of transparency in some organisations, over-rationalisation of participant experience, and more broadly, dehumanisation. Participants also felt that housing organisations had made certain shifts to lower administrative overhead, though this worsened the quality of service offered to unsuccessful applicants like themselves.

Chapter 6 attempts to use participant experience with social housing allocations to define the purposes of allocations, as perceived by participants, and to explore how these perceptions compare to the actual functioning of social

rented housing allocations in answer to the research question “how do applicants experience the mechanisms of social rented housing allocation?” This was undertaken to address the idea of “cultural lag” between the real and perceived functions of social rented housing allocation. This is in keeping with an approach developed within Science, Technology, and Society to identify the operating practices of a societal technology independent from the perceived purpose of that technology, because perceived purpose may not equate to operational practice. Participants described three primary mechanisms of social rented housing allocations as they experienced them: waiting, rationing, and choice. In their assessment, they gave undue weight to both waiting, because of “waiting lists,” and choice, because of “choice-based lettings.” They appeared to be unaware that social rented housing is so strictly rationed, though their long waits might have indicated that this was so. Rather, they attributed their long waits to an influx of applicants of other groups, including several nationalities, ethnicities, and refugees. Few participants noted an overall shortage of social rented housing as the primary cause for their failure to gain access to social rented housing, though many did note that new programs encouraging home ownership through state subsidies were inaccessible to them. This speaks to the shift in the UK away from targeted housing welfare and towards universal housing welfare, a shift which participants seemed troublingly unaware of.

Finally, this thesis will conclude by summarising its findings, addressing weaknesses in the research, outlining the importance of its findings in the context of debates on British social rented housing, discussing the contributions of this research to the academic literatures cited, and identifying possible supplemental

research for the future. The most significant finding of this research is that in London, non-emergency applicants to social rented housing no longer have easy access to social rented housing, and that this has caused them significant distress. Participants, living in overcrowded and poor conditions, often believed that they would soon be granted access to social rented housing, and pursued maladaptive strategies as a result. Often, they continued living in poor conditions or did not pursue secondary applications – when such alternative strategies might have served them well – because they thought that their current application was sure to come up soon. For now, they blamed their lack of access on new groups moving into the social rented housing system, yet this is arguably not the case. Instead, it appears that the UK is moving towards a more universal, rather than targeted approach to social rented housing, and this has started by reallocating resources from socially rented properties to subsidies for owner-occupancy or affordable housing. The harm this causes to these lower-class families is significant, and should therefore be reversed by additional investment into new, rented social dwellings. Failing this investment, however, the institutions of social rented housing must do a better job at educating applicants and the public that social rented housing is no longer an easily accessible resource for any but the most emergency of cases.

Chapter 1:

Literature Review

Social rented housing in the United Kingdom has changed significantly in the last 30 years. There are three goals of this chapter. First, to critically examine the elements of the social housing crisis as presented by academics in housing studies as a necessary context for this research. These elements are the scarcity of social lettings, increasing competition in the private rental market, and the fragmentation of social rented housing resources. Second, to examine how these patterns of the social housing crisis fall within the broader debate about the welfare state, particularly with respect to the debate between targeted and universal welfare benefits. The third goal of this chapter is to demonstrate how selected literatures were applied to the problems of the social housing crisis to generate sub-questions for this research. The literatures selected to supplement this work were structural violence (Galtung 1985 and Farmer 1996); Weberian (1978) bureaucracy and public administration; and Science, Technology, and Society (Espeland and Stevens 2008, Rizo 1991). Consideration of these literatures led several sub-questions to be asked, in addition to the primary research question of this thesis: "How have changes to social rented housing provision and allocation in the last 30 years affected non-emergency Londoners' experience of applying for social rented housing today?"

These sub-questions are:

- How do applicants experience the mechanisms of social rented housing allocation?

- What are the positive and negative aspects of rationalisation experienced by applicants to UK social rented housing today?
- Have reductions in the supply of social rented housing and changes to social rented housing allocation harmed those seeking social rented housing, and if so how?

With these three goals in mind of exploring the context of the social housing crisis, of showing how it sits in the broader debate about targeted versus universal welfare, and of examining the use of supplemental literatures in asking sub-questions, this chapter will now turn to its first task.

The Social Housing Crisis

There are three aspects of the social housing crisis that would appear to have affected non-emergency applicants more than any other. First, social rented housing has grown significantly scarcer, making it difficult to access social rented housing particularly for those who are not given reasonable preference. As of 2016, there were 1.18 million applicants waiting for social rented housing, compared to just over 1 million in 2003 (DCLG 2017a). Second, remaining social rented housing resources are fragmented amongst many different kinds of organisations. In 2016, 70% of lettings were made by private registered providers (PRPs), compared to 30% by local authorities (DCLG 2016b). Third, the private housing market has become increasingly competitive. Nationally, since 2009, the cost of purchasing a home has risen each year by between 5-10% (Office for National Statistics [ONS] 2017), while wages and rents have only increased 2-5% per year over the same time period (ONS 2016). This has forced individuals who would otherwise have bought a home to

rent privately, inflating the price of private rentals a result. At the same time, there are also more people looking to rent privately who would have rented socially, driving demand even higher. These three changes combine to leave marginal applicants to social rented housing particularly vulnerable to being excluded from good and affordable housing. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss each of these elements of the social housing crisis which has left these people vulnerable.

It is important to highlight that although the research carried out here has been on “non-emergency” applicants to social rented housing, it does not seek to imply that “emergency” applicants (those with significant reasonable preference, such as those who have been defined as homeless, etc.) are served adequately, either. On the contrary, significant research has been carried out on reasonably preferred populations and found them to be tragically underserved, as well (see Alden 2015a/b and Watt 2016). The emphasis on this research is on “non-emergency” applicants to social rented housing (those without significant reasonable preference), largely because it was this population that inspired this research particularly as it engages with the idea of cultural lag between people’s perceptions of social housing allocations and the realities thereof. An interesting piece of research to be carry out in the future would be an investigation into how the perceptions of social rented housing differ between those who have been identified as emergency cases, versus those who have been identified as non-emergency cases. For now, this research is concerned with the perspective of non-emergency cases based on anecdotal perceptions of cultural lag occurring in that quarter, but it is necessary to emphasise that emergency applicants are considerably underserved, as well.

The public policies retrenching social housing represent a gradual but significant shift towards a conservative approach to public housing (King 2006, Hodgkinson and Robbins 2013, Watt 2016). Some have argued that they have been necessary as a result of changing circumstances that limit government's ability to invest in housing (Blair 1998 and Giddens 2013). Others argue that these policies have sought to change government priorities in housing to better serve alternative groups (see Deacon 2000, Rose 2000 and Prideaux 2001). Whatever the cause, it is clear that social rented housing has changed considerably, much to the detriment of some.

The Scarcity of Social Rented Housing

The first element of the social housing crisis is the growing scarcity of social rented housing. This has taken place over the course of many years in several phases, and results from the combined effects of many policies originating from different governments.

Arguably the decline of social rented housing began in 1980 when Margaret Thatcher took office. Thatcher, ostensibly responding to public perceptions of the "sink estate" as wasted public investment, implemented several policies to reduce government involvement in housing (Jacobs et al 2003). These efforts took three forms. First, she gave to social tenants the Right to Buy their properties, removing these rented social homes from circulation permanently. Each home purchased was one fewer that was available to the local authority in the future, and councils were forbidden from using the proceeds of Right to Buy sales to build new council housing (Jones and Murie 2008). Second, the Thatcher government withdrew

public funding for the construction of new council housing. Without this funding, local authorities were unable to build new housing, and so construction of new units ceased almost completely. Third, they reduced the funding made available to councils for the maintenance of existing council houses (Back and Hamnett 1985). With fewer funds available for their maintenance, local authorities began large volume stock transfers, or LVSTs, to housing associations and arms-length management organisations, or ALMOs (Jacobs et al 2003, Ginsberg 2005). The combined effect of these three policies was to decrease the number of social rented housing units rented by local authorities. Some of these were now owned privately, while others continued to be let by housing associations and ALMOs. By far the most significant “new social landlord” was the housing association, which continues to dominate British social rented housing (Pawson and Mullins 2010). This can be viewed as a neoliberalisation of social rented housing stock (Watt 2009).

When Tony Blair came to lead a new Labour government in 1997, these policies were not reversed. Rather, the introduction of private market operating procedures into social rented housing, via housing associations, was confirmed as a positive outcome of the Thatcher government and therefore maintained. The number of housing associations continued to proliferate during the Blair years, coming to dominate the social rented housing landscape by the time the Coalition government of 2010 replaced Labour. The Coalition government sought to once again decrease government spending in social rented housing in implementing the Welfare Reform Act 2012, this time by reducing the amount of rent the government paid to housing associations and local authorities in under-occupied homes. Often

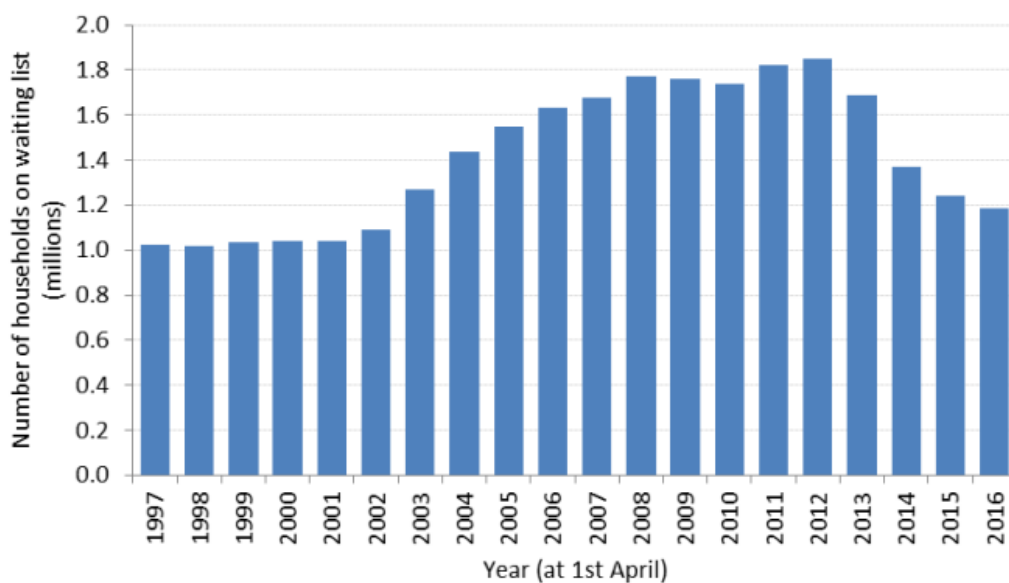
referred to as “the bedroom tax,” the stated goal of this legislation was to encourage social tenants who were renting homes with extra bedrooms to relocate into smaller units, freeing up their larger homes for families that needed the dwellings. It has drawn many criticisms for being a heavy-handed attempt to further decrease social rented housing expenditures. There are very few homes for under-occupying tenants to downsize into (Beatty and Fothergill 2014).

Finally, the current Conservative government has instituted a 1% annual decrease in the rents it will pay to housing associations across the board, for four consecutive years. The stated purpose of this legislation is to force the housing association sector to collapse through merger, resulting in the redundancy of extraneous staff. An easily foreseeable consequence of this reduction in funding, however, has been the near complete halt of new social rented housing construction. 2015 saw a 1% decrease in the number of social rented housing units made available by housing associations, the first downturn in an otherwise longstanding trend of housing association construction that has continued since (DCLG 2016). As housing associations merge with one another and recalculate their financial projections, new social rented housing construction from that quarter is unlikely.

As a result of the above policies, social rented housing in the contemporary era continues to be defined by extreme scarcity. This has caused social housing allocations to take on a very strict, rationing role. In 2015/16, 374,612 households were allocated a social dwelling, and most of these went to newer applicants with housing priority of some kind (DCLG 2016b). In contrast, there are approximately 1.18m on local authority waiting lists (DCLG 2017a). The effects of this scarcity on

the applicants to social rented housing are direct and dramatic. See chart 1, below, for the history of the social rented housing waiting list since 1997. Note the spike from 2008 to 2012, which was likely curbed due to the Localism Act of 2011 allowing local authorities to more actively restrict entry to their social rented housing waiting lists.

Chart 1: Local Authority Waiting Lists (DCLG 2017b)



Scarcity in social rented housing has had several effects. First, scarcity of social rented housing leads to a longer waiting list, requiring new applicants to remain on the list for longer before being allocated a property. Evidence for the extreme scarcity of UK social rented housing can be seen in the long wait times current applicants are experiencing, which rose sharply and peaked in 2012 at over 1.8m (DCLG 2017a). This is problematic because applying to social rented housing in the United Kingdom is a signal that a household is in a state of distress; the longer these households must wait for social rented housing, the longer they are in

distress. This distress may be economic pressure from high rent, overcrowding as a result of living with extended family, or living in fear because of anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhood. A long waiting list makes all of the above worse, because it ensures that these conditions must be endured for longer.

In particular, the bedroom tax has exacerbated the scarcity of one- and two-bedroom homes. This has had a negative impact on current under-occupiers by directly reducing their already meagre household income (Dominiczak 2013, Wright 2013). It also carries a cost for new applicants to social rented housing by causing a glut of transfer requests from downsizers, who are often given priority over new applicants. For an example of this, see Tower Hamlets' allocation policy (2016), where under-occupiers are placed in the highest category of preference. There is already a scarcity of one- and two-bedroom properties in social rented housing (Wilcox and Perry 2013), and these transfers have only made this scarcity more pronounced. It is therefore particularly unlikely that new applicants seeking such a home will be able to acquire one, because transfer cases take priority over new cases.

The second effect of high scarcity of social rented housing is that some applicants will be completely denied access to social rented housing (Fitzpatrick and Pawson 2007), whether directly by being turned away or indirectly by being made to wait longer than is practical for them. With relatively few social properties to be allocated, social housing allocations must ration vacancies to the households that need housing the most. This means that households without extreme need are less likely to receive assistance. Current government policy requires certain groups to receive preference in housing allocations. These include those who are

overcrowded, living under threat of violence, are homeless or imminently homelessness, and those with certain disabilities (Bretherton and Pleace 2011). Social housing organisations usually take quantitative measurements of household need based on these, and other challenges, and allocate homes to the household with the most need. With as few homes as are available currently, unless a household can demonstrate that they deserve “reasonable preference” it is increasingly difficult for them to be allocated a home. Households with reasonable preference will always jump to the front of the queue, though this is not immediately obvious to those applying for social rented housing.

Scapegoating Residents of Social rented housing

In this research, I have observed that current social rented housing residents are being held responsible for participating applicants’ failure to obtain social rented housing. This blame was often oriented towards particular groups, such as disabled people, particular ethnicities, or families with many children. Few participants identified scarcity as the key problem preventing them from being allocated a home. Rather than blaming the systemic lack of social rented housing for the shortage, these applicants blamed “the other” applicants or existing residents of social rented housing. Scapegoating is not a new phenomenon in social rented housing, however, therefore it is necessary to give some consideration to the role of blame in the perceived problems of social rented housing.

It has been observed in previous research that the problems of social housing are likely to be blamed on the occupants of social housing themselves. For example, the concept of the “sink estate” is one that resonates strongly with

current perceptions of council housing as the refuge of the underclass, where the economically disconnected are perceived to be housed in isolation from the rest of society. This popular conception has been challenged by Watt (2006) in his assessment of working class experiences of council housing, where participants identified themselves not as part of the “rough underclass” but of the “respectable” working class. Those living in council housing in these narratives were not the disconnected, poverty-reproduced households that they were perceived to be even by participants of this research, but rather very much part of the economy and part of their own communities. Again in 2008, Watt challenged representations of “the underclass” in council housing in his examination of resistance to LVST in Wycombe District, outside of London. Likewise, Dench (2006) examines the blame placed on Bangladeshi’s in the East End of London, likewise finding that the story is more complex than one of “reproduced poverty.”

Nonetheless, perceptions of “sink estates” have frequently marginalised this population, blaming them for the degeneration of the estates they occupy though the origin of poor conditions is likely infrastructural and/or poor planning (see Lees 2013). Council estates constructed in the 1960’s and 1970’s, particularly those built in the brutalist tradition, tend to age poorly both from an aesthetic perspective and a functional one. Ethnographic research into the experience of the tenants in these developments, however, identifies different trends to those assumed in the popular perception of sink estates. Rather than rough, dangerous living conditions and unfriendly environments as popularly perceived, these “sink estates” were often composed of working class communities that spoke of urban decline, belonging,

and knowing people (see Watt 2006; also Reay and Lucey 2000). Participants of this research also held these apparent misconceptions about sink estate residents.

Scapegoating against the occupants of social rented housing is therefore nothing new in social rented housing, yet as will be explored in the following chapters, it is still very much practiced – even by those who are seeking social rented housing. Ultimately the scarcity of social rented housing is likely due to the lack of new build and the continued degeneration/demolition of aging stock, as described earlier in this chapter; not on the preferred treatment of any one group of applicants, be it an ethnicity, families with many children, or disabled people.

The third effect of scarcity on the social housing crisis is that households may not realise that being registered for social rented housing does not guarantee the timely allocation of a home. The economists Lindsay and Feigenbaum (1984) write about the mechanics of the waiting list, discussing in particular the function of opportunity cost on the decision about whether or not to place oneself on a waiting list. They argue convincingly that an applicant's perception about how much time will pass between their application for and their receipt of a desired good has a significant effect on the likelihood of their application. If receipt of the goods is unlikely to take place in a useful time frame, which is arguably the case for most households applying for social rented housing, application is unlikely. According to this line of reasoning, then, households in less than desperate need probably should not apply to social rented housing because they are unlikely to receive any benefit from doing so. Yet, applications are at an all-time high, despite diminishing likelihood of success. This seems to indicate a lack of knowledge on the part of

applicants that it is indeed unlikely that they will be allocated a home. This research has sought to confirm this, and found it to indeed be so.

The fourth effect of scarcity on the waiting list is the perverse incentivisation of need (Fitzpatrick and Pawson 2007). By limiting the allocating of social rented housing to those households in the most need, policies have encouraged applicants to become as needy as possible, either through self-inflicted homelessness or dishonesty in the application process (Smith Institute 2006). For example, a household with employed adults is less likely to be allocated a social property than a household with unemployed adults, because unemployment threatens the latter household with homelessness. Some potential strategies for accessing social rented housing would therefore be to purposefully lose one's job, to lie about being employed, or to seek unreported employment "under the table." Perverse incentives are one way for less needy applicants to successfully navigate social housing allocations, which because of the scarcity of social rented housing, otherwise acts as a barrier to entry.

The fifth effect of scarcity in social rented housing is an increased threat of homelessness and temporary accommodation for economically vulnerable households. As discussed at some length by Watt (2017), Peck and Tickell (2002), and Fitzpatrick and Pawson (2014), the decrease in social rented housing stock taking place over recent decades has simply resulted in fewer households being housed in social rented housing. However, the demand for this service has not diminished but increased, nor has the statutory requirement for homeless households to be housed been eliminated. There are still economically vulnerable people that need housing; if they are not housed in social rented housing, then the

local authority must house them in temporary accommodation at significantly greater expense per housing unit. One participant of this research had been allocated temporary accommodation while they waited to access social rented housing, and many more participants indicated that they had been in and out of temporary accommodation throughout their housing histories.

Alternatively, households that are in extreme need for housing may not be housed in temporary accommodation, but be made homeless instead. This can result from a local authority classifying someone as intentionally homeless, which alleviates the council's burden to house them and which multiple participants indicated had happened to them; or it can result from an applicant not sufficiently advocating for their own housing rights, not having someone advocate for them including the council, or even encountering informal resistance on the part of the council that disengages the person from claiming their housing rights (see Watt 2017 for vivid examples of resistance on the part of the council). Several narratives indicated that participants had been classed as intentionally homeless, even though participants disagreed vehemently with this classification.

These narratives of potential homelessness and temporary accommodation both in participants' current housing and in their housing history will be explored in subsequent chapters, and these are themes that have been explored in other literatures, as well. Most recently, Watt (2017) examined narratives of accommodation arising from Olympic East London. Participants of his research were single mothers applying for housing from Newham and Waltham Forest, yet were required to relocate away from their support networks and into temporary accommodation as part of their journey towards social rented housing. The

participants of this research had been essentially forced into accepting temporary accommodation in lieu of permanent, social rented housing, which is scarce. Though the narratives obtained in this research align with Watt's, they are drawn from a slightly different population that represent a different housing solution to the one observed in Watt's research. Whereas Watt's participants are those that persisted with their applications as involuntarily homeless and therefore reasonably preferred, the participants of the research presented here are those that either lacked such this preference, or who did not pursue it because of negative interactions with local authority housing officers.

Broadly speaking, it does appear that increased scarcity of social rented housing resources has had a negative impact on the experiences of participants of this research. Some of this is due to there simply not being sufficient socially rented housing resources to provide such a home for everyone; but as can be seen above, this scarcity has also led local authorities and other housing organisations to ration their resources in pernicious, and in some cases illegal ways.

Scarcity and the Street Level Bureaucrat

As described above, it has been observed in this and other research that housing officers allocating social rented housing are likely to exercise some level of potentially arbitrary judgement in whom to house, as a response to scarce resources. Lipsky (2010) refers to this phenomenon "street level bureaucrats." These are individuals who personally deliver public services to consumers, in this case, housing officers that decide to whom homes should be allocated. Street level bureaucrats (SLBs) have considerable discretion in how they deliver these services,

and they are often required to interpret law and policy which can be vague in its wording. When resources are scarce, they may arbitrarily reduce the level of service provided to the public to meet personal or organisational goals, by denying service to some individuals. Lipsky indicates that street level bureaucrats operate in a difficult zone: their role is to assist all service users, yet they are often equipped with insufficient resources to do so.

This was certainly the case for the housing officers that helped inspire this research. These workers wanted to help the people that applied to them for housing, yet due to a much greater demand for social rented housing than the available supply, were unable to do so. They confessed that for them, the inability to do this work contributed to high stress, low job satisfaction, and burnout. However, the focus of this research is not on the effect of scarce public resources on street level bureaucrats, but on those they serve.

Lipsky argued that the outcome of SLB activities are usually negative, and arise from a paradox in resource availability: the SLB is required to serve everyone, but does not have the resources to do so. When policy or law is vague, the SLB must then fall back on some other guidance to decide to whom priority is given. Lipsky argued that this other logic can, and often does, arise from the individual themselves; Alden (2015a/b), meanwhile, argues largely in support of the theory but found that the logic employed in allocating scarce resources is more likely to be organisational in origin, usually on the part of supervisors or managers in creating an organisational culture. The interpretation of SLB secondary logic will likely vary between individuals, organisations, etc., resulting in a geographically uneven distribution of services. In short, a SLB in one part of the country is likely to respond

to scarce resources differently from a SLB elsewhere; therefore, the clients in these two areas will be served differently. This violates a fundamental purpose of social services, in that all people should be treated equally. SLB discretion is therefore problematic.

This is further problematic in social rented housing in the UK because of the fragmentation of social rented housing resources between multiple different organisations, as described below. Lipsky argues that the greater the discretion allowed by individual organisations and the staff that compose them, the more pronounced the uneven distribution of outcome becomes. For this reason, the fragmentation of social rented housing resources amongst local authorities, ALMOs, and housing associations is even more critical, because each organisation allocates homes independently of one another. This wide field of organisations working in social rented housing will likely contribute even further to SLB activity. It is likely that the behaviour of a housing officer at a small housing organisation will be considerably different from that of a housing officer at a large local authority. This leads to different experiences and outcomes for applicants to social rented housing throughout every corner of the sector, a theme that will be explored in subsequent chapters through participant narrative.

Alden (2015a/b) has carried out similar work to this on the related topic of local authority housing advice services (or LAHAS), and how street level bureaucrats in these services exercise discretion in the provision of homelessness services. She observed that many local authorities did practice “gatekeeping,” whereby they would accept some applicants but deny others based on criteria outside of required criteria, such as household composition or gender. Alden found that the pressure to

gatekeep was greater in local authorities with more limited resources and that such pressure was often derived from the organisation by way of supervisors and managers, rather than the individual themselves as Lipsky had originally hypothesised.

These findings bear considerable relevance to this research because of the level of discretion exercised by housing officers in making social rented housing allocations. Housing officers have a statutory requirement to house homeless families, and even though they have written guidance in the form of law and policy, Alden found that street level bureaucrats still exercised considerable discretion that resulted in radically different approaches between different local authorities. Alden's findings would seem to indicate that the experiences of participants to this research project, which has sought to engage not with emergency housing officers but with non-emergency housing applicants, would vary even more because of the relaxed guidelines around nominal, versus required social rented housing practices. If Alden found variance in outcome within statutory homeless housing, this research should find even more variance of outcome within voluntary lets by the fragmented social rented housing organisations, and this has found to indeed be so. If we accept that applicants to social services should be treated uniformly, this is as Lipsky argues, problematic.

As has been argued above, scarcity in social rented housing has had a severe effect on applicants' experience in seeking social rented housing. As a result of scarce conditions, the waiting list has gotten longer, and many will be turned away. For those that are aware of the unlikelihood of their success, scarcity makes the

needy condition perversely desirable, perhaps causing applicants to seek to be in need so that they can be successful in their application. Scarcity has limited the resources of social rented housing, yet done nothing to dissolve the demand for those resources; this has resulted in increased discretion on the part of individual housing officers and organisations, an example of street level bureaucracy that is problematic if we accept that all applicants to social rented housing should be treated equally.

The Fragmentation of Social rented housing Resources

The second element of the social housing crisis is the fragmentation of social rented housing resources. Prior to the Thatcher government reforms of 1980, social housing in the United Kingdom was provided almost exclusively by local authorities, though charitable and philanthropic organisations also played a role. The Thatcher policies set in place in 1980, however, fractured this provision amongst three kinds of organisations: local authorities, arms-length management organisations, and housing associations. Yet it was New Labour that fractured them further. Taking control of Parliament in 1997, the Blair government followed nearly two decades of Conservative dominance in housing policy by implementing their “Third Way,” an approach to governance meant to reconcile liberal and conservative politics in a time of tightening budgets (Giddens 2013). It has also been argued that the Third Way was meant to secure the position of the Labour party by maintaining their influence over the political centre by adopting neoliberal policies (Deacon 2000 and Prideaux 2001). Within social housing, this meant continuing to support market-based mechanisms in solving the problems of

housing. New Labour accomplished this by emphasising the role of housing associations in meeting the needs of social rented housing applicants; expanding the ability of private property owners to register themselves as social landlords; and relying on the private housing market to supplement the ability of social rented housing to provide homes for those in less immediate need (Kemeney 2002). The resources of social rented housing that were once centralised within local authorities are now fragmented amongst local authorities, arms-length management organisations, housing associations, and private landlords (Hickman and Robinson 2006).

These policies have had several effects on social rented housing. First, it has increased the amount of knowledge an applicant must have to apply to social rented housing. Housing provision now differs many types of landlords, each of which operate in their own way. Social rented housing allocations have moved from being a singular entity organised geographically by the local authority, to being distributed and interpreted differently by varying organisations (Shelter England 2016). In 2016, there were 688 private registered social housing providers, which are predominantly housing associations that coexist within and across the bounds of local authorities; these made an average of 322 lettings per provider. By comparison, there were just 205 local authorities providing social rented housing, making an average of 709 lettings (DCLG 2016b). Every organisation will have its own way of allocating homes, and there are many housing organisations within any one area. Therefore, instead of understanding one system, applicants must now acquire expertise in the allocation systems of all organisations in the area within which they wish to apply for housing. Those that do not undertake this task will be

less likely to succeed in their quest for social rented housing. See table 1 and graph 1 for historical data on the continued fragmentation of social rented housing resources; note that the proportion of lettings by local authorities continues a downward trend.

Table 1: Lettings by Provider Type (DCLG 2016b)

Year	All lettings			Providers			Average lettings per provider		
	PRP	LA	Total	PRP	LA	Total	PRP	LA	Total
2007/08	221,417	145,403	366,820	688	205	893	322	709	411
2008/09	239,554	139,528	379,082	685	187	872	350	746	435
2009/10 ¹	226,586	141,169	367,755	644	177	821	352	798	448
2010/11	259,562	134,063	393,625	675	174	849	385	770	464
2011/12 ²	267,206	127,278	394,484	659	171	830	405	744	475
2012/13 ²	258,731	119,312	378,043	626	168	794	413	710	476
2013/14 ²	270,659	125,812	396,471	616	170	786	439	740	504
2014/15 ^R	268,273	117,070	385,543	621	172	793	432	681	486
2015/16 ^P	261,163	113,449	374,612	638	171	809	409	663	463

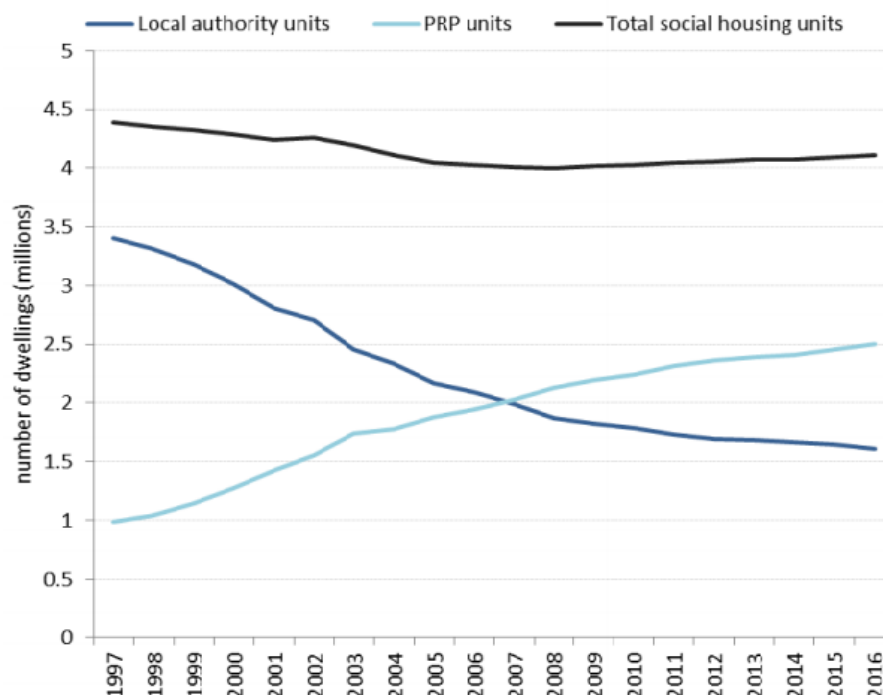
1. 2009/10 data are estimated to reflect 90% of PRP lettings. Collection was likely to have been affected by a change in contractors collecting the data. Local authority data is weighted, based on around half of lettings.

2. Estimates include reported Affordable Rent Lettings from 2011/12

R. Local authority estimates for 2014/15 have been revised due to the availability of final 2014/15 Local Authority Housing Statistics data, used to weight the CORE data.

P. Local authority estimates for 2015/16 are based on provisional weights due to the provisional status of 2015/16 Local Authority Housing Statistics data

Chart 2: Number of Total Dwellings by Provider Type (DCLG 2017b)



The second effect of the fragmentation of social rented housing resources is that those applicants without the above expertise will be significantly less likely to be successful in their social rented housing application. Not realising that social rented housing has become so divided, they may only apply to a few or even one social housing organisation. This is particularly troubling given the nature of the population applying to social rented housing; distressed households are vulnerable to a number of risk factors that reduce the likelihood of good decision making (Rutter and Latore 2008). Acquiring expertise and maintaining an ongoing application in the many housing organisations requires dedicated time, yet households undergoing financial and other hardships may be dedicating time to tasks that are more immediate, such as working, seeking employment, or caring for dependent family members. Some councils are very descriptive about the role of alternative organisations, for example see Hammersmith and Fulham (2013); others advertise almost nothing, possibly misleading applicants into a false sense of unity in social housing allocation. Distressed households would benefit from unified and simplified application procedures. The fragmentation of social rented housing into many separate organisations may have been particularly harmful for such applicants. This research has found that participants had widely varying levels of understanding about different organisations' allocation practices, as well as varying levels of understanding that they should know different organisations' practices, both findings that will be discussed in Chapter 7.

The third effect of the fragmentation of social rented housing resources has been the attempted marketisation of the waiting list through choice-based lettings (or CBL). Choice-based lettings were introduced by New Labour to emphasise the

role of applicant preference in the allocation of social housing (Dowding and John 2009). Instead of waiting for their names to come to the top of a waiting list, as had previously been the practice, applicants must now register their interest in new vacancies through an online portal that lists currently available properties. The household with the greatest measured need is then offered the home. As of 2012, 28% of local authorities did not allocate homes based on choice-based lettings (Gray et al 2013), while many housing associations continue to maintain waiting lists. Unfortunately, conditions of extreme scarcity have meant that CBL has had relatively little effect on who is actually allocated a home: policy still does not allow choice to take precedence over need, therefore properties are still allocated to those in the direst circumstances (Pawson and Hulse 2011). However, CBL has fundamentally changed the way applicants experience the allocations, turning a passive experience into an active one that requires constant interaction (Brown and King 2005). Whereas applicants before CBL placed themselves on the waiting list, then waited for an allocation, applicants within a CBL scheme must now be actively involved in the process regardless of whether they are likely to win their bid or not. This, too, requires a great deal of attention on the part of applicants.

The fragmentation of social rented housing resources has had a severe impact on social rented housing and social rented housing allocations. Whereas applicants once had to deal with only one organisation, they must now deal with many. They must first come to know what organisations exist beyond their local authority; they must come to know those organisations' allocation policies; they must then apply for housing to the many organisations; and they must constantly bid on the homes of those organisations that make use of choice-based lettings.

Overall, the most significant effect of the fragmentation of social rented housing has therefore been to make the job of the applicant much more difficult. They must have more expertise, and they must be more actively involved in the application process. This is unfortunate because households applying for social rented housing are likely to be under duress, and may not be in a position to dedicate such resources to their application. Furthermore, because social rented housing in the UK is so scarce, this fragmentation has done little to alter who would optimally be allocated a home; vacancies, strongly rationed, still must go to the household with the most need, possibly rendering all of this effort moot.

Increasing Competition in Private Renting

The third element of the social housing crisis in the United Kingdom is the increasing competitiveness of the private rental market. Private renting has become the most contested tenure in the United Kingdom, in response to several conditions. First, policies enacted over the past thirty years have sought to reduce the role of government in providing housing for low-income families, and as a result many households that would once have been socially housed must now attempt to seek low-cost private accommodation. This has increased demand in the private rented sector. Simultaneously, foreign and domestic migration into the UK has continued to be a significant contributor in households seeking to rent privately, a trend that has increased in the last decade as financial troubles throughout Europe have encouraged young professionals, service workers, and labourers to move to London in pursuit of job opportunities that are scarce elsewhere (Travis 2014). Finally, and particularly in London and the southeast, house purchase prices have

continued to rise between 5-10% per year over the last ten years, which has been significantly faster than wage rise, up just 2% per year for the same time period (ONS 2016). This has made home ownership increasingly difficult for aspiring households, forcing them too into the private rented market and further increasing demand for rented homes (Dorling 2014). This has given rise to the phrase “generation rent” (Lund 2013). It is not only the supply of socially rented homes that is outstripped by demand; private rentals too are also very scarce. The resulting competitiveness of the private rental market has driven costs up. This has in turn made the housing market ripe for investment by those who can buy homes specifically to take advantage of high rental returns. Although this housing market has been profitable for many (Leyshon and French 2009), the “buy to let” movement has even further restricted home ownership. In sum, these changes have encouraged a private rental market that is considerably more expensive for the renter. This has had several negative effects on applicants to social rented housing, who must often rely on private renting in lieu of social rented housing.

The first effect of increased competitiveness in the private rented market on applicants to social rented housing is overcrowding. If a household cannot afford a home that can accommodate every member of the household comfortably, then they must rent a home that does not accommodate everyone comfortably. Alternatively, some households will elect to lodge with friends or family, although the potential unsuitability of such homes to comfortably accommodate two households is also likely to lead to overcrowding (Pawson and Wilcox 2011). Within the United Kingdom, a house is considered overcrowded if it has fewer than one bedroom per person, excepting same-sex children and coupled adults.

Overcrowding in the home has been associated with negative effects of both a physical and psychological nature on individuals and families. It encourages the development of respiratory disease and infections and causes psychological stress, especially in children, who also suffer from lower educational attainment (see Martin et al 1987, Taylor et al 1997, and Pevalin et al 2008).

Second, a more expensive rental market encourages absenteeism in parents within households applying to social rented housing. This results from parents seeking to work more to pay higher rent. Instead of or in addition to renting a smaller home at lower the cost, parents may work a greater-than 40-hour week to increase the financial resources available to the household. This is problematic not only because it removes the parent from the home, necessitating alternate forms of childcare at potentially significant further cost to the family (Wheelock and Jones 2002), but also because “time poverty” (Harvey and Mukhopadhyay 2007) poses its own problems, such as stress, fatigue, and cardiovascular and musculoskeletal illness (Johnson and Lipscomb 2006).

In addition to renting or sharing a smaller home and working more, a third strategy that households may employ in combating increasingly expensive rentals is to relocate to an area with a less restricted supply of homes. London and the southeast have extremely competitive housing markets, both for private renters and those seeking social rented housing. Therefore, if an applicant to social rented housing were open to moving from London or the southeast to an area with a greater supply of housing, they would receive two benefits: first, their private accommodation would be less expensive, meaning that they could rent a larger home and/or work fewer hours while remaining on the waiting list. Second, they

would likely have a better chance at successfully accessing social rented housing, as waiting list length diminishes drastically once outside of these particularly impacted regions (CLG 2017). Similar to the issues facing downsizing households, however, such applicants will be removed from the areas that they have become accustomed to residing in, leaving behind significant networks of support. Also, although London and the southeast do have more competitive housing markets, they are also the areas within the United Kingdom with the most economic opportunity, as expressed by higher wages and access to services (ONS 2016). Moving outside of these areas, therefore, is potentially disadvantageous in more subtle ways. This research found that participants were usually unwilling to consider leaving their areas, though there were several notable exceptions to this.

The tenure of private renting has become swollen by tenants as a result of pressure from two ends of the rented spectrum. On one end, it is increasingly difficult to access social rented housing, forcing households that would rent socially to rent privately instead. On the other end, it is increasingly difficult to purchase a home outright, also forcing potential owner-occupiers into the private rented sector. This increase in demand has driven an increase in cost, which has resulted in several negative consequences for those renting privately that would otherwise be renting socially. They live in overcrowded, low quality housing; or they overwork themselves to afford their housing; or they leave the areas they would prefer to live in for areas with greater access to rented private and/or social housing; or all three. The policies implemented to reduce government's investment in social rented housing have sought to tap the private rented market as an auxiliary for low income

households; unfortunately, increasing demand for these homes has increased their price to a point where this is no longer feasible (Ball 2010).

London in Context of the Crisis

The research presented in this thesis was carried out within London's 33 boroughs. One reason for this was that the "social housing crisis" is at its most extreme within London. 35 years of neoliberal policy and austerity reforms from Conservative, Coalition, and New Labour governments have likely eroded social rented housing across the nation, but nowhere more so than in London. Yet, this implicit assumption should be explored. The purpose of this section is to examine what makes London unique within the UK with respect to the broader "housing crisis." Though the conditions that have brought about this crisis do exist outside of London, one could say these conditions have been allowed to reach a "critical mass" in London that does indeed make the housing crisis here categorically worse.

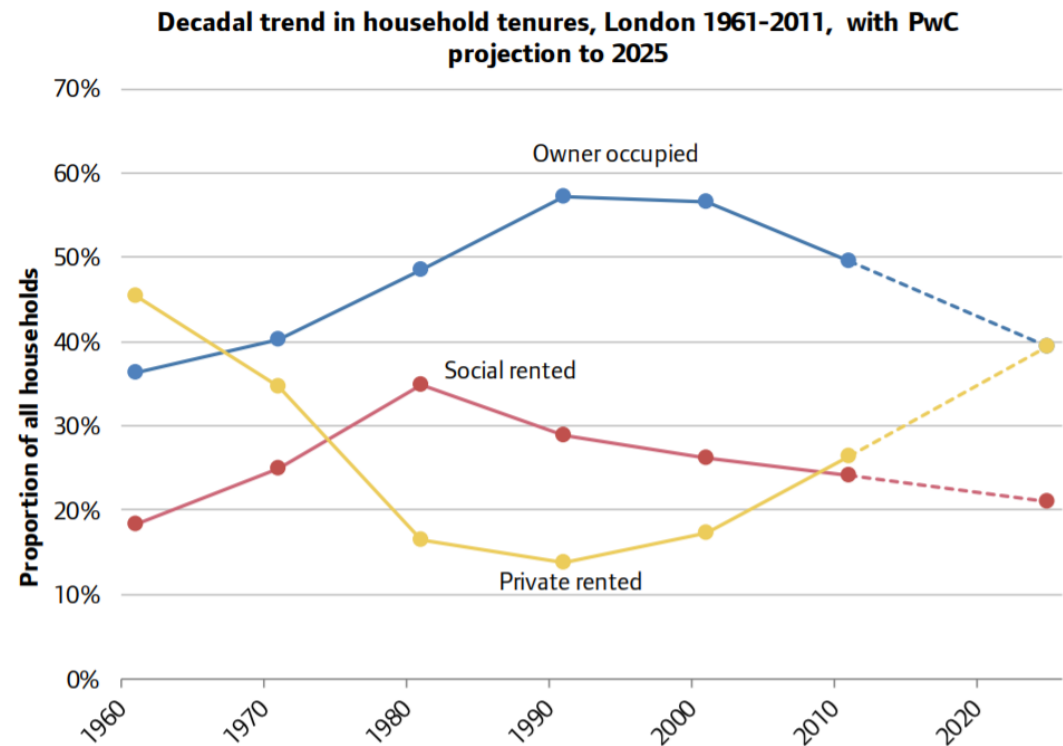
Watt and Minton (2016) discuss some unique aspects of the most recent London housing activism. Rather than "outside agitators" advocating for housing on behalf of local residents of social rented communities, Watt and Minton highlight recent activists as being composed more of local residents advocating for the preservation of their own communities in the face of state-led redevelopment and gentrification. This, they argue, appears to be a new development, though they question whether it will be sustained overall. The remainder of this section will seek to identify statistical differences between London and the rest of the UK that has brought these activism about.

The first aspect of London housing that is nearly unique is the size of the social tenure in London, as compared to the rest of the United Kingdom, as well as the speed with which the makeup of this tenure is changing now. Historically, social rented housing in London has been a greater proportion of the tenure than in other places in the United Kingdom, with a few notable exceptions. According to the DCLG Dwelling Stock 2017, social rented housing in London climbed sharply from approximately 19% in 1961 to reach a peak of 35% of the tenure in 1981. It then fell to 24% by 2011 and is projected to fall further to 21% by 2025. Owner-occupancy, too, fell from 57% in 1991 to just under 50% in 2011, and is projected to fall further to 40% in 2025. As the social rented and owner-occupied tenures have fallen, private rented accommodation has grown to from 14% in 1991 to 26% in 2011, and is expected to continue its rapid growth to 39.5% of tenure by 2025. To summarise, London's tenure is changing drastically. Owner occupancy will likely be down, social renting will likely be down even more, and private renting will continue to grow rapidly.

Although this trend is not isolated to London, London is where this pattern manifests most extremely (Dorling 2014; Edwards 2015). In 2016, the percent of households renting privately in London was 26%, compared to 20% in England (DCLG Dwelling Stock 2017). The price for such private rental is significantly higher in London, too; private London median rent as of March 2017 was £1,495 compared to £675 in England, or 121% higher in the capital (Valuation Office Agency 2017). The purchase price for homes is also significantly higher, and the gap is only widening. The average purchase price for a home in London in 1986 was £55,000, rising to £534,000 in 2016; in England, the average home price rose from

£38,000 to £298,000 over the same time. Thirty years ago, a London home cost 45% more than the English average; now the purchase of a London home is 79% more expensive (ONS House Price Index 2017). Given the expense of renting or buying, the importance of an available supply of social rented housing is highlighted. Neoliberal and austerity social housing reforms have relied on the private rented stock of the UK to act as an avenue for economically vulnerable people to turn to for their housing needs, but if these resources are becoming more difficult to access, this population will need to make sacrifices in the quality of the housing they obtain to continue living in London. This is reflected below.

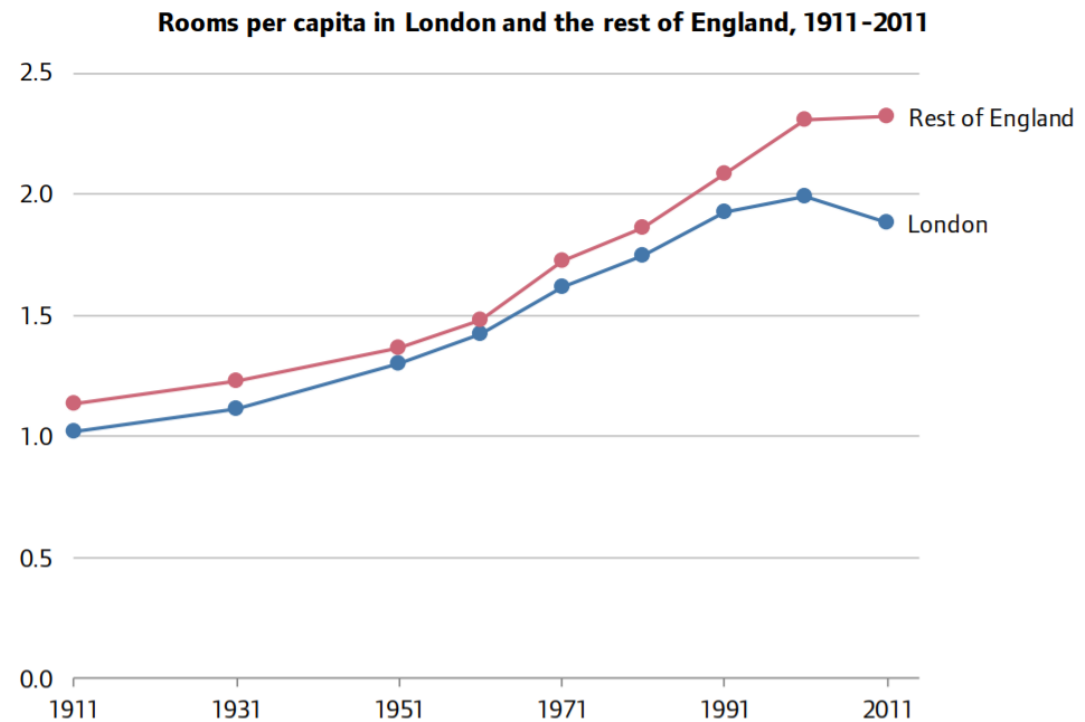
Chart 3: Decadal Trends in Household Tenure (GLA 2017)



The second way London is unique in housing is the level of overcrowding present within the city. The Greater London Authority (GLA) discusses overcrowding

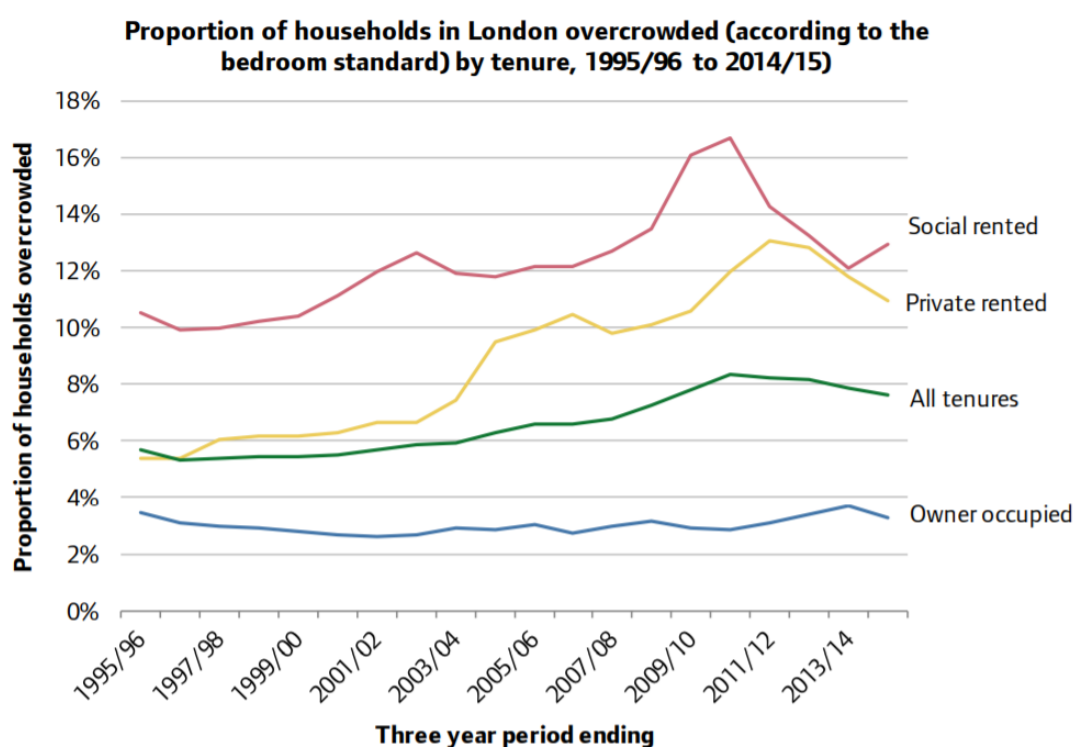
in London at some length in their 2017 edition of Housing in London. In this report, they indicate that between 1911 and 2001, the number of rooms per capita increased every year from 1.02 rooms per Londoner to 1.99 rooms per Londoner. In 2011, the latest year for which this measure has been calculated, that number had then fallen (for the first time in a century) to 1.88 rooms per Londoner. By comparison, the rest of England rose from 1.11 rooms per capita in 1911 to 2.26 rooms per capita in 2001, and then remained almost steady at 2.25 rooms per capita in 2011. These numbers indicate that on average, Londoners have always been more crowded than non-Londoners, yet along with the rest of England they have become less crowded over the past century. The report discusses the reversal of this trend in the last decade, as London has now become more crowded than in previous measures for the first time since 2001. Given the relatively steady rise in rooms per person in previous decades, this reversal is rather sharp.

Chart 4: Rooms per Capita (GLA 2017)



The GLA indicate that the overall crowded rate within London, as measured by the “bedroom standard,” has also increased from just under 6% in 1995 to just under 8% in 2016, a figure which is driven by significantly by the increase in private and social rented tenure. Private rented tenure reached a peak in 2010/11 of 17% households overcrowded, while private rented tenure reached a peak of 13% of households overcrowded in 2011/12. Although these numbers have fallen significantly in recent years to 13% and 11% respectively, this measure too represents a stark departure from the overcrowding rate in the rest of England. By the bedroom standard, the (ONS) 2011 census found that only 4.5% of households were overcrowded in all of England; by comparison, 11.3% of London households were deemed overcrowded. In some London boroughs, this number was especially high: Newham was 25.2% overcrowded; Brent 17.7%; Tower Hamlets 16.4%, Haringey 15.9%; and Waltham Forest 15.4%. These five boroughs represented the most overcrowded local authorities measured in 2011, all in London. By the most common measures of overcrowding, London is clearly more overcrowded.

Chart 5: Proportion of Overcrowded Households in London (GLA 2017)

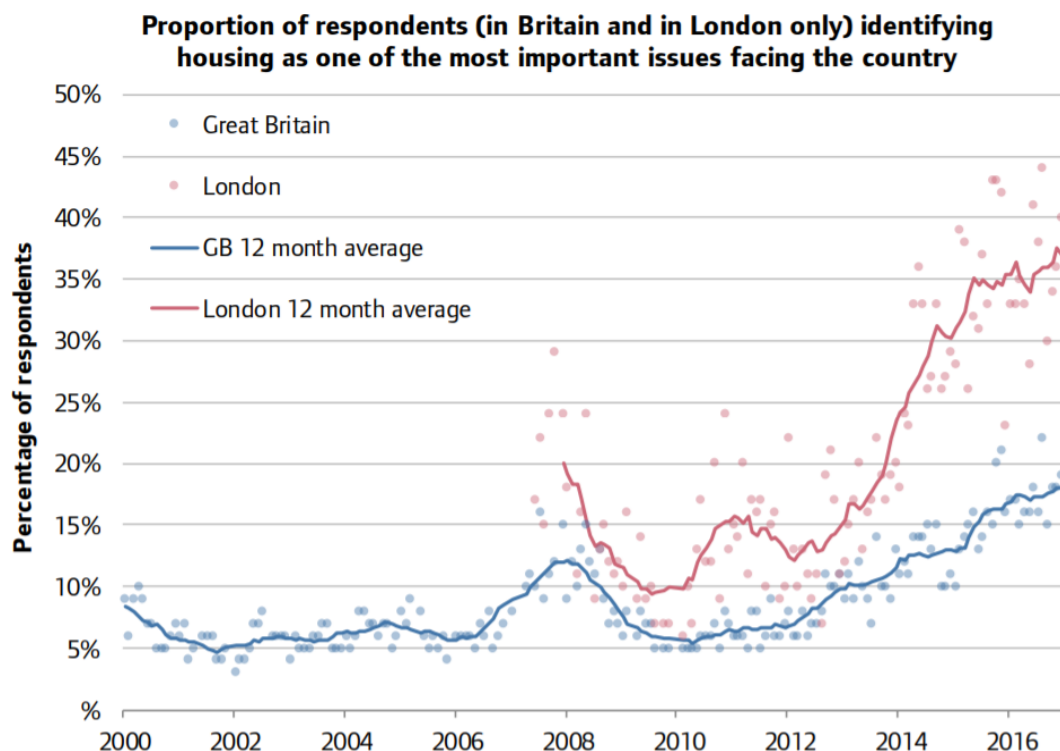


The third aspect of housing in London that makes it unique is the length of waiting lists for social rented housing. As of April 2016 (CLG), there were 1.18 million households on local authority waiting lists in England; 228,000 of these, or roughly one in five, were from a local authority in London. Overall, this number of 1.18 million households on the waiting lists represent a 5% decrease from 1.24 million the previous year, which is likely a continuing result of the Localism Act of 2011 allowing local authorities to decline applicants from registering on the waiting list because they do not meet authority-defined criteria for a local connection. Despite the recent implementation of the Localism Act, and the reduction of waiting lists by about 35% between 2011 and 2016, waiting lists in London are still particularly long when compared to the rest of the nation. In 2016 the ONS estimated that there were 3.3 million households in London, with 227,549 households registered on a waiting list in a London local authority, or 14.3%. By

contrast, the rest of England was estimated to have 19.4 million households, of which 956,230 were registered on local authority waiting lists, or 4.9% of the local population. The proportion of households living in London compared to the number of households on the local authority waiting lists in London is therefore nearly triple the proportion calculated for the rest of England.

In addition to the quantitative measurements above, it is also important to recognise that housing is a matter of great public concern, and much more so for Londoners than for people living outside of London. When asked if housing was one of the most important issues facing the country, Londoners were significantly more likely than non-Londoners to respond that it was. 18% of respondents in Great Britain indicated housing was a most important issue; almost 37% of Londoners did, or roughly twice as many (GLA 2017).

Chart 6: Perceptions of Housing as an Important Issue (GLA 2017)



Broadly speaking, the housing crisis may not be unique to London; however, the circumstances that have brought the housing crisis to the UK are likely at their most extreme in London. This section has sought to demonstrate that this is the case through a presentation of comparative, historical statistics showing how London has been different for a long time, and that these differences are only accelerating. More people are renting privately in London at the lower end of the cost spectrum because they cannot access dwindling social rented housing resources, and more people are renting because they cannot afford home ownership. These two changes are increasing at a rapid pace, as has been demonstrated above. The influx of people into the private rental market has driven costs significantly up, making the situation even worse for those who seek social rented housing in an era when it is allocated to emergency cases only; the high cost of entry into a private rental means that such people must make sacrifices on space or quality of housing. Because the housing crisis is at its worst in London, it is logical to assume that these sacrifices, too, are at their worst. This research has sought to explore the experiences of applicants on the social rented housing waiting list in London, because though it is likely that they have correlates elsewhere in the UK, the sacrifices made by London-based applicants are likely greater than those outside of London.

Summary of the Social Housing Crisis

The social housing crisis in the United Kingdom has been the result of policy and economic changes over the past 30 years. Many of the policies leading to this crisis have been introduced by Conservative lawmakers, but New Labour has also

played a role in propagating a neoliberal agenda. These have caused a crisis in social rented housing that is made up of three elements: increasing scarcity of social lettings, fragmentation of social rented housing resources, and increasing competitiveness of the private rental market. These three elements have made it more difficult for non-emergency applicants to gain social rented housing, and when as a result of this difficulty they must rent privately, it costs them significantly more to do so. Each element of the social housing crisis has had a particular effect on the way that the allocations of social properties are made. Such changes manifest themselves both in the operation of social housing allocations and in the conditions experienced by those seeking social rented housing. The research described in this thesis has set out to explore the effects of this crisis on the lives of some applicants to social rented housing.

The scarcity of social lettings, primarily a result of Conservative legislation in the 1980s, has made the wait for social rented housing significantly longer. Many individuals on the waiting list may never be allocated a property despite their applications, though they may be unaware of this. Scarcity in social rented housing has incentivised need, encouraging applicants to either lie in their application or sabotage themselves to be assessed at a high level of need. Perverse incentives have been discussed both theoretically (see Fitzpatrick and Pawson 2007 and the Smith Institute 2006) and within actual allocation policies (see Tower Hamlets 2016 and Hammersmith and Fulham 2015), because they run counter to the intention of social housing allocation to provide housing to the most genuinely needy households. At the same time, scarcity has encouraged “street level bureaucrats” to exercise arbitrary judgement in whom to house. The Coalition government also

sought to decrease housing benefit paid to under occupying tenants, reducing their benefit while exacerbating the scarcity of smaller social rented housing units because allocations give preference to downsizers.

The fragmentation of social rented housing resources amongst many organisations has led allocations to become divided. Once, each region had a single social rented housing waiting list that was organised by the local authority. Now, each region is likely to host multiple housing associations in addition to the local authority. Each of these organisations can have their own method for allocating vacancies, or they can register their vacancies on the local authority-administered choice-based lettings scheme. Applicants to social rented housing must be experts in all of these different organisations and their allocation schemes to maximise the chances of their gaining access to social rented housing. This is a time-consuming task, particularly because choice-based lettings themselves take significantly more involvement on the part of the applicant than the waiting lists did. Although choice-based lettings seek to allow applicants to choose their homes, the positive effects of this are limited due to the extreme scarcity of homes. There are in fact very few choices to be made (see Jessop 2002 and Salecl 2011). The fragmentation of social rented housing resources between different organisations and allocation systems has increased the amount of expertise applicants must possess.

In addition to scarcity and fragmentation in the social rented housing sector, the private rental market has also become more competitive. This has occurred as a result of two forces: increasing scarcity of social rented housing and increasing home purchase price has caused lower- and higher-income households, respectively, to enter the private rented tenure instead of social rented housing or

owner-occupancy. Demand is therefore very high for private homes, increasing rent commensurately. This has made it difficult for low income households to comfortably rent a private home of their own. In response, applicant households can rent a smaller property or live with friends and family, but this can lead to overcrowding. Alternatively, the parents in such a household can take on additional employment, but this leads to absent and overworked parents. Finally, households can relocate to regions with less competitive social and private housing markets, but may isolate themselves from their existing support networks or the economic opportunities that tend to be present in high demand areas. It is likely that the private rented tenure is unable to act as an effective auxiliary for social rented housing overflow, as neoliberal policy suggests it may (Blair 1998 and Giddens 2013).

The last 30 years have been a tumultuous time for applicants to social rented housing. Not only has the availability of social properties diminished significantly, but these resources have been scattered amongst a number of unique providers. Meanwhile, the process for applying to social rented housing has changed considerably. Exacerbating this situation is the fact that the private rental market, supposed auxiliary to social rented housing, has become hostile towards low-income households. One purpose of this research has been to explore the lived experiences of applicants to social rented housing, to discover to what extent the above problems have manifested themselves. It has discovered that, indeed, increasing scarcity and fragmentation of social rented housing and more competitive and expensive private rented housing has made life difficult for some

applicants to social rented housing. The conditions under which some of these applicants live will be the topic of discussion in Chapter 3.

With the problems of social rented housing firmly in mind, this chapter will now turn towards the broader question of the welfare state, the nature of targeted versus universal systems of social rented housing allocation, and how the UK might be both moving towards a more universal system, and inappropriately applying a universal allocation system to what is still a targeted service.

Social Housing in the Welfare State

Social housing in the United Kingdom is just one aspect of a multifaceted series of institutions that collectively form “the welfare state.” As defined by Asa Briggs (1961), the welfare state is a concept of governance where the state uses its power to protect and promote the well-being of its citizens. It achieves this by modifying market forces in three ways: first, by guaranteeing individuals and families a minimum income; second, by securing individuals and families against certain contingencies such as illness and unemployment; and third, by ensuring that all citizens are offered the best of certain, agreed-upon social services. These three pillars of income, security and services continue to define the welfare state today. There are many components to the welfare state in the UK and elsewhere, not just social housing but also public education, nationalised medical care, government-organised retirement pensions and monetary support to name a few. The welfare state is an umbrella term that covers a great number of services that varies by country. Because social housing is a key component of the welfare state in the United Kingdom, it is even more difficult to divorce the two concepts. Rather

than attempting this, then, it is the intent of this section to engage with the idea of the welfare state as a whole so that discussion on that broader topic can inform this research.

This engagement with the research topic is made in two ways: first, it would appear that the UK has borrowed choice-based lettings from the Netherlands. This is a mismatch of a universal interface for the allocation of social housing onto an operation that is targeted in nature. Second, it would appear that the UK is investing less in targeted social housing via rented social dwellings, and investing more in universal social housing via Affordable Home Ownership Schemes (2017). This research has attempted to explore participant experience in these two areas, to ascertain the effect of them on participants of this research.

There are few clearer definitions of the welfare state than that posed by Asa Briggs in his 1961 essay “the Welfare State in Historical Perspective.” In this foundational piece, Briggs looks back over several decades of developments in the welfare state taking place in many different places throughout the UK, Europe, the Americas, and Australia, and identifies what he considers to be the identifying characteristic of that form of government. Briggs writes:

A welfare state is a state in which organised power is deliberately used (through politics and administration) in an effort to modify the play of market forces in at least three directions – first, by guaranteeing individuals and families a minimum income irrespective of the market value of their work or their property; second, by narrowing the extent of insecurity by enabling individuals and families to meet certain ‘social contingencies’ (for

example, sickness, old age and unemployment) which lead otherwise to individual and family crisis; and third, by ensuring that all citizens without distinction of status or class are offered the best standards available in relation to a certain agreed range of social services. (Page 228)

Briggs thus establishes three pillars of the welfare state: a minimum income, securities against contingencies, and the best of an agreed range of social services. In the United Kingdom, social housing is one of these agreed upon services, but the nature of provision appears to be changing, as described above. Social rented housing in the United Kingdom has been a targeted endeavour, and remains so, but as new rented social dwellings continues to become more scarce, the importance of being part of this targeted population to gain access to social rented housing is increasing. The participants of this research, failing in their applications as they have, demonstrate that access to targeted housing resources is becoming more difficult to obtain.

Targeted Benefits versus Universal Entitlements

There is a clear division within much of the literature on social services into two groups: those broadly in favour of means-tested benefits as the best means by which to distribute public goods and services, and those who broadly favour more universally available entitlements. Additionally, there are those that would strip all benefits entirely, who for the purpose of this work will be excluded as we are dealing with social services that do exist and will likely continue existing. The language for defining the remaining two camps varies significantly between

authors. Korpi and Palme, in their influential article “The Paradox of Redistribution and Strategies of Equality,” label these two camps as “targeted” and “universal” social welfare, and it is these terms which this chapter will use henceforth. It is important to note that these two approaches are not mutually exclusive, nor do authors treat them as such. As Brady and Bostic (2015) point out:

Universalism is not simply the opposite of low-income targeting. Nor is universalism simply an absence of low- or high-income targeting... Universalism captures a wider variety of sources of heterogeneity and distinctively involves homogeneity of benefits in general across any and all categories. (Page 274)

Targeted benefits predate universal entitlements. Rothstein (2001) borrows Tullock’s (1983) definition of targeted benefits as any project that implements a means-test, requiring that a person or household applying for a particular service be within certain maximum thresholds, often but not necessarily of income or assets. Targeted benefits are by their nature redistributive, employing the “Robin Hood” strategy according to Korpi and Palme (1998) of robbing from the rich to give to the poor. They seek to take some of the wealth accumulated by the middle- and upper-class, and redistribute it to a defined segment of the population to increase their quality of life to within an acceptable threshold. Korpi and Palme argue that because of the redistributive nature of targeted benefits, they are both cheaper to implement and more directly effective at achieving greater equality. If the goal of a social program is to redistribute income, they argue, then targeted benefits may seem to be more appropriate. However, targeted benefits must overcome a

significant challenge: building popular support. This has certainly been the case in the UK, where social rented housing has been heavily criticised as “sink estates.”

Korpi (1983) argues that whilst targeted programs may have a significant redistributive effect per unit of money spent, they face difficulty in building the political coalition necessary to enact their changes. Because targeted social welfare provides benefit only to a limited group of people it creates a division within the population between those that will benefit from a targeted welfare proposal, who are likely to support it, and those that will not benefit, who are unlikely to support it. This is not just divisive, it is polarising. Skocpol (1991) writes:

Rarely do advocates of targeted benefits or specially tailored public social services face up to the problem of finding sustained political support for them... They do not explain why working-class families with incomes just above the poverty line, themselves frequently struggling economically without the aid of health insurance or child care or adequate unemployment benefits, should pay for programs that go only to people with incomes below the poverty line... When U.S. antipoverty efforts have featured policies targeted on the poor alone, they have not been politically sustainable, and they have stigmatised and demeaned the poor.
(Page 413)

While critics of targeted benefits argue that such systems face difficulty in building political coalitions, they argue too that more universal entitlements, such as first time homebuyer assistance, affordable home sales, and below market rate lettings, can build greater support for themselves even if this approach is less

efficient at the redistribution of wealth. Universal entitlements aim to achieve equality by offering equal provision of social services to everyone.

Tawney (1952) provides an early definition of “universalism.”

...[Universalism is] the pooling of surplus resources by means of taxation, and the use of the funds thus obtained to make accessible to all, irrespective of their income, occupation, or social position, the conditions of civilisation which, in the absence of such measures, can be enjoyed only by the rich. (Page 130)

Successful implementation of universal entitlements helps to create a culture where the population is more open to such programs, further increasing the support of future universal entitlement proposals. Universalism has an easier time getting the ball rolling on social welfare, supporters argue, while means-tested benefits polarise the majority against social welfare and stigmatise poor people.

Greenstein (1991) gives a vigorous defence of targeted programs, however. While acknowledging that universal social welfare programs do have an easier time building stronger constituencies and that they are less stigmatising, he argues that they should not be dismissed. Under the right circumstances and if properly administrated, they can both build strong coalitions:

Targeted programs are more likely to be strong politically when they serve low-income and moderate-income working families as well as the very poor. They are also more likely to succeed when they are regarded as providing an earned benefit or are otherwise linked to work... when they seem effective, and when

they are not provided in the form of cash welfare assistance for young, able-bodied people who do not work. (Page 438)

Greenstein goes on to argue that the failure of targeted social welfare has not been due to the nature of targeted programs as such, but rather a failure in the way in which they have usually been implemented. By expanding access to targeted benefits, the state can encourage support for them and enjoy the relatively greater ability of the targeted approach in redistributing wealth.

The categorisation of social welfare programs into universal and targeted schemes is directly relevant to social rented housing in the United Kingdom in the context of choice-based lettings. Traditionally, social rented housing in the UK has been viewed as a targeted resource available to those in economic need, who are unable to obtain quality housing on their own; yet, it is not directly means-tested in that there is no maximum income threshold at which point someone will be ineligible for socially rented housing. Until the Localism Act of 2012, anyone could apply. Yet at the same time, only households in some degree of economic distress are likely to be allocated a home, otherwise they will have turned to the private rental market as a more expedient solution to their housing problems. Therefore, though social rented housing in the UK is not by definition means-tested, household income and assets continue to figure importantly in whether or not someone can expect to be allocated a home. Social rented housing in the UK has traditionally served a fundamentally redistributive purpose by targeting certain households for being housed publicly, yet social rented housing allocation in the UK is not means-tested. Rather than means-testing, social housing organisations have used other measures of need to decide whom social rented housing should be

allocated to, and these criteria have shifted significantly over the years (see Fitzpatrick and Pawson 2007). Though these methods are not means-tested, they have historically been targeted, rather than universal approaches to social housing.

This, however, is changing now to emulate social housing models from other nations. For over a decade, the UK has attempted to implement the choice-based lettings model of social housing allocation, developed in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, social housing is a universal benefit which anyone can avail themselves of – however, homes vary in price according to market principles of home desirability. Though all homes are built to meet liveability standards, some are made more desirable by location, architecture, or other distinguishing criteria. These more expensive units then subsidise the less expensive units, funding the entire system while allowing individual parties a greater deal of choice in how they are housed. This is a universal social welfare system, and contrasts strongly with the system traditionally implemented in the UK.

This has led to a universal allocation methodology being implemented in country which has a targeted system for social housing welfare. As Brown and King (2005) argue, this is potentially very harmful, and based on the narratives of participants of this research, this is likely the case. The disconnect between a universal system of social housing allocation, yet a targeted operating of that method, is significant when considering the research question “How do applicants experience the mechanisms of social rented housing allocation?” Not only is this mismatch evident, but it does appear that the UK is moving from a targeted, to a universal approach to social housing allocation.

Housing as the Wobbly Pillar of the Welfare State

Social housing has been called “the wobbly pillar of the welfare state” by many authors (see in particular Torgersen 1987; also Abrahamson 2005, Harloe 2008, and Malpass 2008). Torgersen in particular argues that housing, as a good, is qualitatively different from other services in that allocations are frequently viewed as more permanent; this raises several difficulties which social services are likely to answer with vague standards, in stark contrast to the well-defined standards in other areas of the welfare state, such as education, medicine and pension. This fundamental difference leads to a vulnerability on the part of housing. Malpass argues that the idea of housing as a “wobbly pillar” stems from the traditional perception of the welfare state as a series of public services and of social housing as the least de-commodified of them. Because of this, it has frequently been argued to be the “least popular” institution within the welfare state, and is therefore the most vulnerable to retrenchment by conservative or austerity reform. To apply the universal versus targeted framework discussed above, it is more difficult to reinforce social housing institutions because even in nations that adopt a universal approach to social housing, most households still rent or buy homes privately; it is therefore more difficult to build the popular support that has made, as the most obvious example, the NHS so enduring. Simply put, social housing has been the area most vulnerable to the right-wing strategy to roll back services as a cost-saving measure because fewer people use it. This understanding of the wobbly pillar is reinforced by Kemeny (1980) in his international comparison of home ownership rates and social housing spending. He found an inverse relationship, indicating that as home ownership rates increase, funding for social housing decreases and social

housing takes on a largely residual role, because home owners are unwilling to fund through taxation the creation of social housing resources they are unlikely to use. This is the more traditional understanding of social housing as the “wobbly pillar of the welfare state,” that because social housing is the least commonly used institution in the welfare state, it is the least popular and thus least funded.

However, there is another understanding of social housing not as a wobbly pillar, but as a cornerstone of newer models of the welfare state. Modernisation of the welfare state has sought to introduce client choice into welfare state allocation in many service areas, including education and health, and to marketise certain aspects of these services. This, which might be seen as a neoliberalisation of services, has been pursued in the UK in recent by Conservative and Coalition governments in the form of “privatisation” (see Epstein 2005) and by New Labour in the form of “modernisation” (see Hodkinson and Robbins 2013), yet both can be seen as a neoliberal retrenchment of social housing. In this view, previous implementations of welfare state institutions are criticised as “social command,” and too expensive to continue functioning. Market mechanisms are viewed in a positive light in this context. If this is so, then it is perhaps fair to say that social housing is rather ahead of other institutions of the welfare state, because it has always existed in a mixed-market mode. More than any other welfare state institution, clients often move between public and private housing. By this argument then, social housing is the best positioned institution to respond to increased demand marketisation of welfare state institutions, because it already operates so closely to the private housing market.

Malpass (2008) argues that these interpretations of the welfare state as a wobbly pillar or as a cornerstone of the welfare state are not necessarily contradictory, but complementary. While it is true that social housing is vulnerable to retrenchment due to it being more residual in nature, and increased home ownership in the UK as compared to Europe (see Kemeney 1980) makes it even less popular, this does not preclude social housing in the UK from taking on a leading role in the modernisation of the welfare state. Increasing choice and client responsibility in welfare state institutions should not be seen in a negative light. Malpass argues that while rented, residual social housing is indeed vulnerable to retrenchment because it is serving an increasingly limited segment of the population, broader, more universal social housing efforts can play an increased role in welfare state reforms in response to increasing competitiveness in the private market. In short, residual social housing may indeed be “wobbly,” but newer forms of social housing may have an opportunity to then become more established in response to changing needs.

This is a significant idea for this thesis, which explores the cultural lag in popular perceptions of the role of social housing. As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, many participants of this research applied for social rented housing in search of the residual, social rented housing that was made more widely available in the past. However, as discussed above, it appears that housing resources have indeed been shifted from social rented housing to other, “affordable” housing efforts or been cut completely. This has left the population that is now outside the reach of the retrenched, social rented housing sector

vulnerable. The realisation of their vulnerability is a theme that will be discussed at some length in participant narratives, later in the thesis.

With the context of the social housing crisis and the broader setting of that within the welfare state as a whole, this thesis will now turn to a description of the theoretical frameworks that have been employed in developing the research methodology and findings described in subsequent chapters.

Theoretical References

The aim of this section is to apply academic scholarship from three selected fields to the problems of social housing that were described in the introduction: the scarcity of rented social lettings; the fragmentation of social rented housing resources; and increasing competition in the private housing market. The fields that most significantly informed this research are: Science, Technology, and Society; public administration together with the Weberian bureaucratic model that gave rise to it; and structural violence. Theories selected from each of these literatures bring new insights to the problems of social housing and have aided significantly in the development of methodology and interpretation of findings described later in this thesis. Each of these literatures has been selected to address specific problems identified within social rented housing. Before describing these connections in depth, a brief overview of each area will be provided below.

Science, Technology, and Society (alternatively referred to as Science and Technology Studies, abbreviated either way to “STS”) seeks to connect the changing goals of society to the technologies that society develops and employs. Social

rented housing would not normally be viewed as a technology, but there is school of thought within STS that seeks to analyse things that are not normally categorised as technology in a technological light using the methods of STS. The research described in this thesis has attempted to adopt this approach by viewing social rented housing as a technology, or tool to achieve an end. However, as STS indicates, both society and technology are ever-shifting and rarely align perfectly. The disconnect between applicant expectations of social housing allocations and the reality of social rented housing expectations seemed to indicate that there was a cultural lag taking place, as social housing allocation changes to accord with new policies. STS is particularly well-suited to examining the purpose of new institutions, as if they were technologies, to identify the goals they seek to meet. This led to the supplementary research question: “how do applicants experience the mechanisms of social rented housing allocation?” This comparison between the functioning of social rented housing as experienced by applicants with the declared intent of social rented housing and social housing allocation can be insightful, and has borne particularly interesting fruit in this project’s conclusion on choice-based lettings. It appears that CBL does not align with its stated intent of *expanding choice* and making social housing allocation more *transparent*; rather, it *obscures the real issues of scarcity and rationing* that defined participants experience of social housing allocation. STS was very helpful in exploring the new technologies of social housing allocation as a way to assess the effects of this cultural lag.

The field of public administration has also been consulted in developing this research, specifically the body of work within that discipline directly arising from Max Weber’s work on the “ideal bureaucracy.” Weber outlined the specific ways in

which a bureaucracy best achieves its work and contributes to society; he also outlined the ways in which a bureaucracy can be a barrier to progress and detrimental to society. These works have been built upon in the intervening decades into an entire field concerned with how best to administrate public goods and services. This research project has sought to engage these critical literatures to provide a metric by which we can judge the performance of social housing institutions. By using participant experience of social housing allocation as a vehicle for grading these institutions, one can identify desirable and undesirable operating procedures of the many social housing bureaus that make up UK social housing. This raised the significant question, explored during this research: “what are the positive and negative aspects of rationalisation experienced by applicants to UK social rented housing today?” Of interest in this line of questioning is the difference, as related by social housing applicants themselves, between the experience of applying to local authority housing offices, arms-length management organisations, independent housing associations, and the private market. The differences in experience between these categories of social housing were found to be stark.

Finally, the anthropological body of literature on structural violence has been considered to address the potential harm being done to the population of social rented housing applicants by the way in which social housing provision and allocation are being changed. Structural violence attempts to connect large-scale, macro-level forces with the harm that these forces do to individuals, often via institutions such as social housing. The popular perception of violence is physical, and committed by an individual against an individual. Rather than studying this,

structural violence seeks to understand the harm caused to individuals by institutions, the economy, and macro-scale forces in general (Galtung 1985, Farmer 1996). It attempts this by seeking a broad historical understanding of socio-economic change, and connecting these large and long changes to individual experiences taking place at a much smaller scale. There are two parts to the harm that this research has sought to explore using individual narrative. The first is the harm caused by the overall reduction in the availability of social rented housing, which has been a resource for lower- and working-class British households for over 60 years. The second part of this harm has been the change in social housing allocation that has accompanied this overall reduction in supply, changes which have masked that reduction and led to rather poor decision-making on the part of some households. The question raised by structural violence has been “have reductions in the supply of social rented housing and changes to social rented housing allocation harmed those seeking social rented housing, and if so how?” Once again, this thesis has set out to answer this question with the lived experiences of applicants to social rented housing.

In summary, these three literary bodies of Science, Technology, and Society; Public Administration and the Weberian Bureaucracy; and Structural Violence, when applied to the primary research question “how have changes to social rented housing provision and allocation in the last 30 years affected non-emergency Londoners’ experience of applying for social rented housing today?” generated three sub-questions to better explore that question. These were:

- How do applicants experience the mechanisms of social rented housing allocation?

- What are the positive and negative aspects of rationalisation experienced by applicants to UK social rented housing today?
- Have reductions in the supply of social rented housing and changes to social rented housing allocation harmed those seeking social rented housing, and if so how?

Why Three Theoretical Approaches?

This research has drawn on three academic literatures that lie somewhat outside of the housing studies literature described previously in this review. Due to this, it is necessary to give a brief explanation for why each of these literatures were chosen, and more importantly how they work together to inform this research. The decision to implement multiple literatures, some from unorthodox sources, arises from the anecdotal observations made before this research took.

The role of the structural violence and public administration literatures are perhaps more clearly connected to the research at hand. Structural violence, as described more fully below, seeks to identify instances where harm is done to individuals not by other individuals, but by more macro-level forces, such as the economy, globalisation, or in the case of this research, institutional change. It appeared to me at the outset of this research that institutional change in the form of a shrinking social rented housing sector was doing damage to applicants to social rented housing, because they were unaware of that change. One of the first purposes of this research has been to measure and assess that damage done, and for this, structural violence seemed well-suited. Structural violence seeks to identify macro-level forces doing harm to individuals, exploring that harm through the lens

of individual narrative, and connecting that harm to larger, societal patterns. To best examine the harm aspect of the research carried out, I chose structural violence.

However, structural violence works on two levels: the granular, individual level where it examines the harm done to people; and the macro level, where it comments upon the development and operation of big forces that initiate harm. I found that structural violence did little to bridge the gap between those two levels, in short missing out the “medium frame.” In particular, I believed it did relatively little to look at the specific mechanisms by which such harm is actually, physically carried out by actual organisations, and critically, how such harm might be prevented. To achieve this, I turned to public administration literature, particularly the work of Max Weber. Where structural violence focusses on individuals and the macro-level forces that can filter down to harm them, public administration is about how to deliver social goods such as services, justice, or safety, in a fair and consistent manner. Institutions are the connective tissue that seeks to carry out societally agreed upon positive changes in the lives of individuals, and it does so by wielding the power of democratic government as funded through taxation. Public administration has developed many best practices and measurements that seek to identify how best an institution should work. While structural violence was useful for exploring sources of institutional harm and how they have their originating causes in macro-level forces, public administration was necessary for understanding and measuring the specific, institutional mechanisms by which that harm is enacted. Perhaps most importantly, public administration is also useful for discussing how to avoid such harm if best practices are followed.

Although public administration literature was well suited to identifying how well institutions of social housing operated from the perspective of participants, it did not seem like an effective tool for examining cultural lag as observed in the case that inspired this research, of William and Alexandra. They had very much expected to be housed, but were not, and the housing officers I spoke to indicated that this was very common. To examine the effects of this cultural lag specifically, an approach taken from science, technology and society (STS) was considered because of the emphasis within one field of STS on examining the output of technology to identify the purpose of that technology. It seemed that both perceptions about social rented housing, and advertised methods of social rented housing allocation, were at odds with the actual operation of allocations. Due to this confusing array of beliefs, advertisements, and policies, it seemed necessary to take a “fresh look” at the purpose of social housing allocation policies, from the perspective of what they achieve. STS is an effective tool for this because it often deals with the effect of new, emergent forces on society. Interpreting participant narratives using this approach indicated that the purpose of current social rented housing allocations is to strictly ration social rented housing stock, although this disagrees significantly with the advertised purpose of social rented housing as well as perceptions thereof.

In summary, structural violence has been useful for identifying institutional harm and the macro-level forces behind it; public administration has been useful for connecting the harm experienced by individuals to the institutional mechanisms that carry out that harm, and for measuring how effective these institutions are as public agencies; and STS has been useful for examining the specific idea of cultural lag, as it pertains to misperceptions about the purpose of social rented housing

allocations. It has done this by examining the outputs of social housing allocation in the form of participant experience and found extreme rationing to be the most significant purpose behind it. Each of these literatures has been important to building the broader arguments of this thesis, which will now turn to a more detailed review of each of these literatures.

Science, Technology, and Society

The first body of literature examined will be Science, Technology, and Society studies. Abbreviated STS, this field explores the ways in which society shapes the development of science and technology and how science and technology then reshape society (Gonzalez 2005). STS is usually applied within the fields most commonly associated with “tech,” such as information technology and medical technology. However, some authors take a broader view on the applicability of STS. If one considers the broadness inherent in the definition of “technology,” it implies that STS research can be carried out in almost any field to better understand the interrelations between that field’s technology, the motivations that drive that field, and society as a whole (Bridgestock 1998). Technology “solve[s] problems using whatever means are available and appropriate” (Hughes 1987, page 53). By this description almost anything humanity does can be viewed as technology, and if this is so, an STS approach can be used to understand the relationship between that technology and society. For example, Aikenhead and Ryan (1992), Yager (1996) and Solomon (1993) discuss the development and redevelopment of science education in primary schooling; Wathen, Wyatt and Harris (2008) and Harrison, Kopel and Bar-Lev (2008) discuss the

impetus behind the development of health and health-communication technologies and the effects of them on social perceptions of health; and Bimber (2003), Kleinman (2000) and Sclove (1995) discuss the changing practices of democratic participation resulting from technological innovations and the changed practices that result. In each of these examples, authors analyse the development of technologies within specific fields. They seek to place these technologies in the contexts of the goals of the field and society, demonstrating how technologies shape and are shaped by society.

This thesis draws on STS literature through an analysis of the “technologies” used in social rented housing and social housing allocation. STS has not engaged in study of housing as a technology, yet it has engaged with other social and non-social services, as will be discussed below. Social rented housing is a strategy employed by government to assist part of the population in gaining housing; social housing allocations are the specific tools developed by housing organisations to distribute social rented housing. Both can be classified as technologies using STS’ broad definition. In support of a social housing investigation in the style of STS, this review will then address the following: first, it will seek to define methods of social housing allocation; second, it will seek to identify the societal justifications for the selection of these methods; finally, it will seek to determine the efficacy of these methods and seek to define their effect on subsequent development of housing technology. STS is particularly useful for identifying the purpose of institutions, such as social rented housing, undergoing rapid change; it is well-suited to observing and commenting upon instances of cultural lag, when people’s perceptions about institutions do not align with the functioning of institutions. Using principles of STS,

we can view housing allocations as technology, ask why they were designed in the way they were, and investigate the effects of their use on society and if they are in fact achieving their stated goals or working towards another goal. Housing allocation in the United Kingdom takes two primary forms: the waiting list and choice-based lettings. These are the specific technologies this analysis will focus on. The field within STS that is most applicable to this particular study is quantification and classification.

Quantification and categorisation is a particular literature existing within STS that studies the increasing prevalence of those activities throughout society. The spread of quantified values from the natural sciences into the social sciences (Espeland and Stevens 2008, Rizo 1991), politics (Herbst 1993, Alonso and Starr 1987), law (Sunstein 2000), education (Strathern 1997) and eventually into the daily lives of the general population (Igo 2007) is a well-documented process. STS scholars take a unique approach to examining the spread of quantification first by defining quantification as a technology, and then by exploring the motivations for the adoption of quantification and classification and by investigating the effects of this adoption on society.

Theodore Porter (1996), for example, questions the appeal of quantification. He examines successful historical examples of quantification, as in the attempt in the United States to force American accountants to phrase their judgements of financial management using quantitative terms despite the trust previously placed in these professionals to make qualitative judgements. Porter then compares these successes to failed attempts at quantification, as in the success of British actuaries in resisting the efforts of their government to require them to do the same. He does

this to trace the causality of such different outcomes and to analyse the implications of these differences for their fields and for the societies in which they are placed. Porter asks why quantification of financial risk was successful in the United States, but unsuccessful in the United Kingdom? He proposes that it is because of societal differences between the UK and US, where the latter has a stronger tendency to value quantified over qualified measurements. The outcome of this technological struggle then reinforces that preference, implementing a positive feedback loop that continues to emphasise quantification in American accountancy and culture.

Lampland and Star, meanwhile, collect and edit arguments (2009) on the implementation of quantified standards within organisations where such standards have not historically been applicable. A few examples of cases they draw upon include restaurant food portion measurement (Epstein 2009), the institution of chronological age as a biographic necessity of statistics-keeping (Treas 2009), and standardising humans in the life insurance industry (Lengwiler 2009). The process that these authors follow is to first identify the ethics motivating the shift towards standardisation and quantification; they then examine the process itself; and finally, they attempt to identify the effects of standardisation and quantification both within the field being standardised or quantified and beyond. Porter (1996), Lampland and Star (2009) argue that the increasing cultural value of quantification arises from the perceived benefits of positivist thought in the natural sciences. Because quantification has borne fruit in the natural sciences it is then applied throughout society, though they argue that this may not be appropriate in certain circumstances. Successful technologies can be inappropriately promulgated in fields

where their operation runs at a cross purpose to that field. The example Epstein (2009) gives of this is the quantification of food portion size sometimes compromising the quality of prepared food itself. This results from the geographical variance of some ingredients, seasonal differences in certain foods, and so on which make quantification of ingredients a poor strategy; better to rely on the qualitative judgement of an experienced cook. The broad principal taken from this aspect of STS scholarship is that sometimes, the technology of quantification and categorisation can be borrowed inappropriately and act against the intended purpose of a field or society's purpose for the field in question. This occurs because the society values quantification itself, but it may simply be inappropriate in some circumstances. This is certainly a relevant conversation in the context of social rented housing, where quantification of need is how vacancies are allocated.

Pawson and Kintrea (2002) indicate that as of 2002, 89% of local authorities used quantified needs-based assessments for housing allocation. These systems assign a certain number of points to undesirable circumstances such as homelessness, disability, overcrowding, and time spent waiting. Points are initially measured based on information provided by participants on their social rented housing applications and are frequently verified through interviews or home visits. Once this quantified assessment of need is made, allocations fall into one of two groups: waiting lists and choice-based lettings. In a waiting list system, applicants with the highest points are privately offered the next vacant social housing unit. Housing organisations make appointments with the top three households on the list, and offer the home to them in descending order until someone accepts it. This ensures that the house with the highest quantified need gets the first chance at a

new vacancy. In a choice-based lettings system, vacancies are made publicly viewable by all applicants, who must then sign into an online portal and indicate their interest in vacant homes. Amongst households registering interest, that with the highest quantified need will then be allocated the home. Both the waiting list and choice-based lettings therefore allocate social rented housing units using a rigid and quantified assessment of need (Shelter England 2017a). This is perceived by those who have implemented these systems as a just way of distributing a scarce good by offering a theoretically objective measurement in an otherwise difficult-to-navigate landscape of need and want. Quantification, as a technology, ties strongly into public administration which emphasises the usefulness of objective measures in determining to whom public resources should be allocated.

STS indicates that we should question the tool of quantification, however, by examining the ways in which quantification shapes and is shaped by the expectations of society (Gonzalez 2005). The STS authors above call into question the appropriateness of universal quantification; one of the aims of this thesis is to follow in this tradition by questioning the usefulness of quantification in social housing, specifically. STS authors have examined quantification at some length and found that although it is a useful method for measurement in many disciplines, it can sometimes be inappropriate to apply in others. When applied to human experience, for example, quantification can be dehumanising and denigrating, and ultimately not effective in measuring that which is to be measured (Lampland and Star 2009). It emphasises the mechanical, indicating that one unit of experience is equivalent to another unit of experience when in fact, all experiences are unique. Quantification, by its very nature, removes the individuality from whatever thing it

measures. This aspect of standardisation is useful in many fields, but the lack of individual recognition is not beneficial in the human, social services. Chapter 7 will explore the negative emotions generated by quantification in social housing.

There are other tools within social housing allocation that one can investigate, as well. The three primary tools of allocation are time, choice, and need. These are emphasised differently between the waiting list and choice-based lettings. One might expect “the waiting list” to allocate homes based how long a household had been waiting for a home, while choice-based lettings would allocate based on applicant choices. This assumption would be incorrect, however. As described above, the most important aspect in both the waiting list and choice-based lettings is the quantitative needs assessment. Need trumps both time and choice, despite the names of the two systems. This is an example of the cultural lag surrounding social housing allocation.

This has not always been the case. Fitzpatrick and Pawson (2007) describe housing allocation prior to 1965 as being, not needs-based, but “desert-based” or allocated to whomever had been waiting on the list the longest. At this time, local authorities were not under many regulatory requirements as to how they allocated their housing (Fitzpatrick and Stephens 1999), so they used comparatively simple means. Because authorities were not required to house special groups with any kind of preference, they usually did not (Clope, Milbourne and Widdowfield 2000). Without any specific mechanism required, and with few special needs defined, councils defaulted to a “first come, first served” method as demonstrated by the simple waiting list. There were originally no assessments of need required, because there was sufficient social rented housing for most of those who were eligible. The

benefits of using a waiting list for the distribution of scarce goods or services is discussed within medical and economic scholarship (see Lindsay and Feigenbaum 1984, Besley, Hall and Preston 1999, Martin and Smith 1999). In medicine as in social rented housing, waiting lists were originally implemented because of their perception as a simple mechanism to ensure that amongst a population with equal right to a social good, all desiring that good could gain access to it in a fair and logical manner if they only waited. In social rented housing, this time-based system would not last, though the name for that system – “the waiting list” – has persisted through many systemic changes.

Cowan and Marsh (2005) claim that as time went on, time-based allocation became less emphasised and was replaced by needs-based allocation. This resulted from growing scarcity of social lettings. “Need,” however, is a word whose definition has changed over the years. Expanding on Walters’ (2000) definition, Cowan and Marsh argue that need is a bureaucratically constructed characteristic that government can use as an apparently objective basis for resource allocation, the shifting nature of which often causes applicants to feel dehumanised and “left behind.” Need “identifies an objective without being overly specific, and is ambiguous enough to sustain different interpretations” (Cowan and Marsh 2005: 28). Since entering social rented housing allocation in the 1960s, they argue, the meaning of “need” has changed significantly to become increasingly quantified and stratified, though the nature of this quantification and stratification differs significantly between housing organisations (Lidstone 1994). It is important to note that need means something different depending on the organisation and era being examined. The first expressed need was to provide “homes fit for heroes” for

returning veterans of the First World War (Burnett and Powell 1980). Slum clearance in the 1930's (Jones 2008), housing department responsibility for homeless people in 1948 (Fitzpatrick and Stephens 1999), and preference for disabled people (Stewart, Harris and Sapey 1999) are some examples of new "need" for housing being identified and implemented through legislation. As *need* came to play an increasing role in social rented housing, quantified systems for assessing it were put into place, working with and eventually overtaking *time* as the primary measure by which social rented housing units were allocated. Hodgkinson, Watt and Mooney (2013) argue that a longer waiting list is the logical result of neoliberal shifts in social rented housing policy that have taken place in both the Conservative and Labour Parties to expand need but reduce resources.

Criticisms of quantified, needs-based allocation systems led to the introduction of *choice* into social housing allocation (Fitzpatrick and Pawson 2007). The first criticism was that needs-based lettings did not allow applicants to choose where they lived, usually only permitting them to accept or refuse single vacancies as they became available (Pawson and Kintrea 2002). This was theorised to contribute to low commitment and high tenant turnover in social rented housing communities (Cowan 2001). Second, the "social command" system of housing allocation within the UK (Stephens, Burns and MacKay 2003) was thought to encourage the residualisation of social rented housing (Lee and Murie 1997 and 1999).

Residualisation as a concept in social housing literature has been of significant interest for some time (see Forrest and Murie 1983, Pawson and Kintrea 2002), and it bears relevance to this research because many of the quantitative

assessments of need discussed in this research have arisen out of a desire to reduce residualisation through policy-making. Murie (1997) describes “residualisation” as a contested term that is most often used to describe a few related trends. First, it is used to describe policy changes designed to move social rented housing towards a residual welfare state model that serves a particular, and limited, segment of the population that is most economically vulnerable. This, Murie argues, represents a shift from previous models of UK social rented housing, where social rented housing was more widely available to the working, and even middle class. This understanding of “residualisation” uses the term to denote policy shift towards increasingly limited social rented housing stock that is more severely rationed, as discussed elsewhere in this thesis. Residualisation in this context refers to the housing stock itself, not the people that come to occupy that housing stock.

The second common use of the term is to refer to the demographic composition of households occupying these increasingly scarce properties. As new social vacancies began to be rationed to those in ever greater need, the economic health of these households, on average, predictably began to decline. As the supply of social rented housing continued to decline throughout the 1980s and 90s, rationing became ever more severe, and this concentration of poverty increased as well. While the economic profile of British social housing was becoming homogenously poorer, British social housing officers were observed segregating different ethnicities into different estates (Henderson and Karn 1984). Estates at this time therefore took on a uniquely “ethnic,” and uniquely poor, image, and began to be viewed in a rather negative light. Eventually council housing estates that were segregated and composed of people who were not as economically

active would become referred to as “sink estates,” inferring several things. First, the term implied that no matter how many resources you sank into them, they would never change; and second, it was where you put the lowest-achieving people in the economic order. Residualisation in this context refers to the concentration and reproduction of poverty in certain problem estates, and frequently resulted in the stigmatisation of social housing. In this sense, the word “residualisation” is used to refer to the residual population of society, which has been isolated from the rest of society in these “sink estates.” Murie argues that a better term for this second understanding of “residualisation” might be marginalisation, while Malpass and Victory (2010) argue that residualisation is the inevitable result of modernisation. Hodkinson, Watt, and Mooney, on the other hand, argue that residualisation is not inevitable, but rather a result of a wider pattern of neo-liberalisation that represents a return to “class war conservatism.”

Regardless, both understandings of the term residualisation represent a fundamental shift in British social rented housing. It is indeed taking a turn towards a residual welfare state model, serving only those in emergency need, and this did have an effect on the composition of British social rented housing estates, which has historically been more diverse than it appears to be becoming.

Residualisation is significant for this research, because many of the recent policies discussed in this research were adopted to combat some elements of residualisation. Choice-based lettings was thought to address the segregation of ethnic groups and household disinvestment in their new communities by allowing applicants to choose where they were housed. It was believed that this would prevent discrimination and increase tenant investment (Department of the

Environment, Transportation and the Regions [DETR] 2000) by ceasing to segregate new social rented housing tenants into the same problem estates where vacancies were common (Mullins and Pawson 2005, Kullberg 2002).

Part of the purpose of this research is to investigate these responses to residualisation, and identify what new problems they may have caused for applicants to social rented housing in this new era of extreme rationing. “Choice” sounds good, like something we should try to give people applying to social rented housing; but it is not a silver bullet, and in fact, this research raises the question whether effective choice has been given to applicant in social housing at all and if ineffective choice does more harm than good. Time, choice and need all continue to play important roles in the allocation of social housing. Yet, because both the waiting list and choice-based lettings base their operations primarily on need, that is theorised to be the most influential factor of all three. This reveals a fundamental contradiction between the way housing allocations work and the names we use to describe them. “Waiting lists” and “choice-based lettings” do not make primary use of time or choice as their respective names seem to imply. This is a misleading contradiction, an indication that perhaps these housing allocation technologies are indeed not coordinated with their intended or stated purposes. This appears to have caused significant cultural lag between participants expectations of social rented housing allocation, and how social rented housing allocation now works. STS is effective at examining cultural lag by identifying the role of society in influencing technology, and examining the role of technology on influencing society in a different direction. This thesis seeks to apply this approach to social rented housing, by examining the effects of social housing allocation systems, as technologies, on

the participants of this research to assess the cultural lag that appears to be taking place.

Public Administration and Max Weber

The second body of literature which has contributed to the theoretical framework of this research has been public administration, particularly the branch associated with institutional criteria of success as derived from Max Weber's discussions on bureaucracy. These works provide a metric against which social housing organisations and the allocations they employ can be measured. Weber elegantly defined the positive and negative characteristics of bureaucracy and decades of scholarship have refined these ideas into a field analysing the effectiveness of institutions in achieving their purposes.

There are three primary categories of social housing organisation: the local authority, the arms-length management organisation (or ALMO), and the housing association. Each of these types of organisations tend to operate differently as a group, and express certain variabilities in operation within each group. As such, the institutions of social housing are fertile ground for measure against public administration's definitions of an effective organisation. A primary goal of this research has been to carry this measurement out, using the vehicle of applicant experience to determine the efficacy of social housing organisation as publicly administrated bureaus.

Weber (1978) establishes the foundation for modern public administration, from which the metrics for this research have been drawn. In doing this, Weber identifies several preconditions necessary for the development of bureaucracy.

First, the bureau must be large enough to require rationalised organisation; second, society must be willing to accept and embrace a level of rationalised problem solving; third, the tasks being undertaken by the bureau must be complex; fourth, there must be sufficient communication and transportation technologies to support the bureau; fifth, the bureau must be a democratic extension of the will of the public. If each of these conditions are met, the bureau can be a useful tool for society to achieve its goals. However, Weber was clear that bureaus were not always appropriate, and if misused could do as much harm as good. The utility of bureaucracy, Weber wrote, arises from its objectification and rationalisation of the decision-making processes (Allan 2011). Weber classifies this kind of governance as “rational-legal authority.” In such a system, legitimacy arises from democratic election that establishes a bureau for the provision of a rational benefit to all or part of society per the will of the people. Bureaucracies allow a large and complex society to execute decisions in fair and consistent ways. Public administration is the field of study and practice that has developed around these core ideas to complete this mission, and it has stayed very true to Weber’s initial vision for bureaucracy.

Weber (1978) identifies six positive characteristics of an effective bureaucracy. First, bureaucracies offer distributed, hierarchical organisation of work and delineated lines of authority. Within a bureaucracy, any given task is assigned to a single individual according to the rules defined for that organisation; each individual is then supervised by a higher-ranking bureaucrat for regulatory purposes. This allows an institution to distribute tasks in a logical way to a large work force. Second, bureaucracies manage by rules and should therefore provide control and consistency in process and outcome. Third, a bureaucracy serves the

mission for which it was created rather than the advancement of individuals within the bureaucracy. This check prevents powerful individuals within the bureaucracy from wielding their power for their own personal benefit. Fourth, bureaucracies recruit and train experts and encourage their further specialisation. This focus on expertise ensures that there are progressively more capable personnel to meet the challenges posed by increasingly complex problems. Fifth, operating procedures in a bureau should be both impersonal and public, because such procedures result in greater equality and fairness for those dealing with the bureau. Sixth and last, advancement and dismissal within a bureaucracy should be dependent solely upon merit. This offers protection to the bureau worker who need only be proficient to secure their job, and the best services to the public, who can be confident that only the skilled within a bureau will be retained or promoted. Broadly speaking, these benefits orbit the concepts of justice in governance through rationale decision-making and the development of expertise within institutions to achieve institutional and societal goals.

Though Weber's work has been critical for essentially founding the discipline of public administration, the details of which will be discussed below, it is not without its critics. There are two primary criticisms of Weber's bureaucratic model. First, it does not acknowledge the role of informal structures of authority and communication that exist between and within groups of cooperating humans (see Selznick 1948 and Downs 1967), even within modern bureaucracies. This argument states that the formal structures imposed by bureaucracies have usually failed to subdue non-rational behaviour within organisations. Selznick departs significantly from Weber in his claim that it is not the rationalisation of processes

that gives bureaucracies strength. Instead it is the development of informal networks of cooperation that keep an organisation flexible, even while it applies rational thought and processes to the tasks to which it is assigned. Such informal networks allow a bureaucracy to adapt to changing circumstances and respond to problems that are not specifically allocated to an individual bureaucrat, and therefore supplement Weber's rational construct. Informal layers, Selznick argues, continue to envelope formal bureaucratic processes despite the invisibility of these informal process from an organisational standpoint. Public administration has taken this ethic and developed it further to encourage "friendly professionalism" in the workplace, developing and strengthening bonds between colleagues that transcend the formal hierarchy within which they are organised. Almost paradoxically, these informal bonds strengthen the bureaucracy, and are therefore encouraged within many public organisations by human resources activities. Though this does breed the occasional informality between colleagues in an otherwise formalised system, and this is likely something Weber would have viewed as a failure, it has been shown to add resilience to an organisation in achieving its purpose while simultaneously humanising its bureaucrats by removing them, momentarily, from the rigid structure they normally work within.

Second, the bureaucracy as modelled by Weber does not recognise the potentially superior knowledge of the junior bureaucrat over the senior one that may occur as a result of rapidly changing circumstances. One of the key tenets of Weber's bureaucracy is that senior bureaucrats, who have been promoted because of meritorious service in the past, are best positioned to recommend changes because of their greater experience and training. However, the value of experience

diminishes significantly as conditions change. Demographic and technological shifts in the decades since Weber carried out his work have rendered some of his thinking about hierarchical rank as obsolete, and the rate of societal change has accelerated rapidly with the onset of the information technology revolution. Where once the senior bureaucrat could be expected to be the expert on a subject, rapid changes to technology and field circumstances now mean that officer-level positions are best equipped with necessary information and skills to assess superior tactics. The senior bureaucrat then becomes a more supportive resource to their junior staff, curating expertise and accelerating reactive ideas up the decision-tree and making the organisation more agile in response to changes as a result. This is known as “agile” governance (Dunleavy et al 2005) and it is fundamentally antithetical to Weber’s original ideas about how a bureaucracy should be run from the top down.

Today, public administration is based on five pillars which have been refined from Weber’s original six principals of the effective bureaucracy. These are organisation, ethics, policy, budgeting, and human resource management (Turner et al 2008; Bovaird 2009). Organisational theory, or simply organisation, deals in the way public institutions are hierarchically organised to best achieve their mission; this is usually accomplished through an officer, management-, and executive-level separation of responsibilities. Ethics in public administration refers to the process by which decisions are reached, and attempts to normalise this process as much as possible through the application of rationale thought. Policy seeks to enshrine ethics in written word; where ethics is the philosophical guidance for public administration, policy is codified operational practice. Budgeting is the method by which public organisations decide how to allocate their limited funding. Human

resources ensure that public organisations hire, train, and retain the best experts in their fields. The parallels between these five subdivisions of public administration and Weber's original six features of the ideal bureaucracy are clear, yet the development within each of these refined areas is significant. There is now a well-established and constantly evolving best practice in public administration.

Though Weber is a strong proponent of bureaucracy, he also strongly cautions against it for bureaucracy can become perverted. Critically, Weber claims that his six characteristics are those of a perfect or ideal bureaucracy. In fact such a bureaucracy is unlikely to exist anywhere, at any time, because human endeavours are fundamentally flawed. As bureaucracies offer certain positive aspects, they are also therefore prone to practice negative aspects as well. These weaknesses, Weber argues, are derived from the same mechanisms that drive the positive elements of bureaucracy: rationalisation and objectification. Each negative aspect of bureaucracy is in fact a positive aspect, inverted and turned perverse by incorrectly or over-applied rationalisation and/or objectification.

The first perversion of bureaucracy identified by Weber is the potential loss of individuality, both on the part of bureaucrats and those they serve. For those working within a bureaucracy, workers become seen not as individuals with intrinsic desires and emotions, but as parts of a machine: replicable, replaceable, and not unique. This is a result of the rationalised, role-oriented nature of bureaucracies. Normally the rationalisation of processes is a strength, however when taken too far, employees begin to feel as though their working role defines them as individuals, and this can have negative consequences on health. Likewise, bureaucracies judge those they interact with or serve using rational measures that are relevant to the

organisation's mission. Aspects of a person that are unrelated to that mission are therefore not normally considered, and in fact are often viewed as a threat that can compromise the objectivity of the rationalised process. Though again, the rational treatment of individuals is useful to ensure equal treatment, it can be taken too far when the people served by a public organisation begin to feel that they are not seen as people, but as a collection of statistics. Weber argues that rationalisation must be used as a tool to achieve an objective; rationalisation must not be allowed to become the objective.

The second perversion of bureaucracy described by Weber is the reduction of autonomy and individual initiative within bureaucracies, resulting in a less robust ability on the part of a public entity to respond to emergent situations. This is a result of the delegation of responsibility through the supervisor/subordinate relationship, coupled with the clear delineation of responsibilities. On the one hand, delegation and delineation limit the potential influence of individuals within a bureaucracy and ensure that members stay on task within their designated roles; these are positive traits, ensuring that no single bureaucrat can co-opt the bureau for their own ends and also efficiently distributes tasks to those best suited to accomplish them. However, when operating in a changing environment, bureaucracies can become unwieldy by this very virtue. Individuals within a sufficiently rigid bureaucracy are unlikely to act on problems that they view as outside of their individual, usually bounded area of responsibility. Meanwhile, bureaucrats at a higher level of authority who have greater flexibility in their areas of responsibility are unlikely to come into contact with emergent situations in the field because of the nature of their responsibilities as managers.

The third perversion of bureaucracy comes when an institution promotes itself, as a means of gaining power within society. Authority within the setting of a bureaucracy is not assigned to individuals, only to roles. Therefore individuals cannot use charisma or tradition to increase their prestige while working within the confines of the bureaucracy except to increase the prestige of the bureaucracy itself in promotion of the bureaucracy's mission. Given this, it is possible for bureaucrats to promote the authority of their own bureaucracy as a method of increasing their own authority or prestige within society, a phenomenon known as "the dictatorship of the official."

Like the positive elements of bureaucracy, each of these fundamental perversions has been explored to some greater depth within the discipline of public administration. Ethics and human resource management, respectively, deal with the tendency of public organisations to dehumanise both employees and the populations served. Ethics considers carefully the elements of an individual which need to be rationalised to serve the purpose of a bureaucracy, and go out of their way to avoid rationalising people outside of that strict need. Much attention is paid in public administration ethics to recognising the individuality of persons served by or working with the bureaucracy. The purpose of rationalisation in this context is not to eliminate individuality, but simply to make the work of the public institution achievable. Ethics seek to keep this in mind, transparently communicating this guiding principle to people with whom a public organisation works while acknowledging the uniqueness of each person with whom they work. Likewise, human resource management concerns itself largely with the wellbeing of employed bureaucrats (Daley 2012). A significant proportion of the work done in

public HR has relatively little to do with the recruitment, retention and training of skilled individuals and engages instead with cultivating individuality within public organisations in two ways. The first is to recognise the individual contributions of employees as something that is unique to each person, which could only have been achieved except through individual effort. The second is to recognise in the workplace setting that each worker has individual strengths and weaknesses as well as personal characteristics that are unique to them that may be unrelated to their work. Encouraging recognition of individuality has been shown to increase worker productivity, and this is one significant undertaking for human resources within the public sector.

Likewise, the reduction of autonomy and individual initiative has been addressed in public administration in different ways, largely within the subfield of organisational theory. There are two recent movements in public organisational theory that address this point, specifically, and these have occurred in sequence in the 1980s with New Public Management and the mid-2000s with Digital Era Governance. First, New Public Management (or NPM) arose as a response to the increasingly large, complex, and unwieldy public institutions of the 1960s and 70s. Moving into the 1980s, institutions faced significant difficulties in achieving their missions because they could not respond with agility to either emergent problems or local conditions. The top-down organisation of bureaucracies at the time was no longer meeting the needs of the public, therefore several changes were implemented which were dubbed NPM. The first was a decentralisation of decision-making authority, or autonomy, away from senior executives and towards operational managers. This improved reflexivity was meant to allow more localised

staff to respond to emergent issues specific to the contexts within which they operated (Lane 2000). The second tenant of NPM was to introduce competition, incentives and other elements of private organisation into public organisation as a way to boost productivity (see Waldo 2006). Some of these efforts were successful, for example the implementation of boards of directors in local governance in the United States. However, this element of NPM has been criticised roundly as being a political realignment of public institutions with fiscally conservative motivations to reduce costs to the government by privatising services. As such, some aspects of NPM were not operational changes meant to improve service, but political changes meant to alter the very nature of service provision. Social housing itself is one such example of this, where in the 80's government moved away from direct provision of housing towards more competitive models fractured between local authorities and housing associations. This shift was not to make housing organisations more agile, but to reduce the overall cost of their provisions.

The more recent development in public organisational theory is Digital Era Governance (DEG), which seeks to address the failures of NPM through three methods: reintegrating key services back into the government sphere, the holistic treatment of particular groups seeking government services, and the adoption of digital media as an effective strategy for increasing transparency and process efficiency in governance (Dunleavy et al 2005). DEG seeks to maintain some of the advantageous aspects of NPM, such as the more distributed forms of authority which allow local managers to make reactive decisions, while at the same time reversing some of its failures in divesting government of critical services. DEG then seeks to build a legacy of its own by using new information technologies in

governance to make rational decisions more quickly and to make the operation of public institutions more transparent to the public. In social housing, the influence of DEG has been operationally significant, even if housing has not itself been brought back into the domain of direct government provision. Most choice-based lettings schemes are managed digitally, and for someone who is technologically shrewd, there has never been more information available on exactly how social rented housing allocations are made. This raises a criticism of DEG however, because it may require that people be technologically literate to engage fully with the public organisations serving them (Margetts and Dunleavy 2013).

Weber outlined several potential problems with bureaucracies, and public administration has done much to address these problems in the intervening years. The most significant of these problems for social rented housing are the dehumanisation of applicants to social rented housing and the operationalisation of social housing allocation, as informed by both NPM and DEG. One purpose of this research is to examine applicants' experiences with NPM, DEG and other models to assess their effectiveness, while at the same time assessing if applicants' interactions with social housing institutions have dehumanised them.

Amongst the potential negative elements of bureaucracy described by Weber and the public administration literature cited above, social housing in the United Kingdom seems to struggle the most with the potential over-emphasis on rationalising need to the point of dehumanising individuals. While several STS authors have discussed the feedback effects of quantification on society (see Lampland and Starr 2009; Epstein 2009; Treas 2009; and Lengwiler 2009), public administration would seek to identify whether quantification and rationalisation

were serving the needs of the bureaucracy or if it were in fact doing harm to the public and the bureaucrat. Lee and Murie (1997; 1999) discuss the dehumanising process of social rented housing application, as individual cases see their conditions equated to point values which are then pooled to achieve a quantified measurement of need that can be ranked against others' measurements.

Bureaucrats then come to see the numbers associated with cases, not the actual conditions in which people live. Meanwhile, applicants themselves have the day-to-day truths of their lives obscured by a number. This process could easily dehumanise both the bureaucrat working on the case, and could certainly dehumanise the applicant. Furthermore, it is no longer the alleviation of poor living conditions that is the mission, but the allocation of housing to the case with the highest measure of need. Applicants therefore "chase points," potentially through perverse incentives (Turner 2009), while bureaucrats do the same.

In addition to considering how social housing institutions may meet the negative aspects of bureaucracy, one can also consider the ways in which they fail to meet the full potential of the positive aspects. For example, though allocations are rule-based and meant to purge prejudice and bias (see Fitzpatrick and Pawson 2007, Cowan and Marsh 2005, and Kullberg 2002), it has been demonstrated that housing bureaucrats continue to effect allocations based on factors that are not part of the institution's codified rules for allocation (Murie 1997). The most cited example of this is the ethnic segregation that takes place in English housing authorities, by which particular ethnicities are allocated dwellings in the same or proximal estates despite there being no institutional rules with regards to allocation by ethnicity (Karn and Karn 1984). Though this much-publicised problem may have

been dealt with in the twenty years since its discovery, anecdotal experience leads me to believe that housing managers continue to have significant discretion in whom they house. This undermines the positive principals of control, consistency, and rationality suggested by Weber and further developed by public administration. Part of the purpose of this research has been to compare participants' experiences with social housing bureaucrats, to assess which positive as well as negative elements of Weber's bureaucratic model they manifest from the perspective of the applicant. Thus, public administration is also useful for examining the problem of the "street level bureaucrat" described earlier in this chapter.

When compared to ideal bureaucratic and public administration standards established by Weber and developed by others, social rented housing allocation may be nearer the ideal in some ways while being non-ideal in others. Furthermore, considering the role of rationalisation in social rented housing allocation is particularly interesting. This has led to the sub-question "what are the positive and negative aspects of rationalisation experienced by applicants to UK social rented housing today?"

Structural Violence

The third theoretical foundation of this research is structural violence, an anthropological approach that explores the relationship between macro-level structural conditions that directly and indirectly contribute to forms of "violence" enacted against vulnerable members of society (Galtung 1985). While STS and Weberian bureaucratic studies have both been useful in identifying positive and negative characteristics of social housing organisations, and examining ideas of

cultural lag, structural violence can be used to better understand the ways in which the experiences of applicants reference back to the broader structures of housing allocation within which such experience exists. Structural violence seeks to observe and communicate individual experience and place it in wider economic and social contexts. It therefore has a political dimension in addition to its knowledge-seeking one. Structural violence not only seeks to understand the connections between violence done at an institutional level to the individual narratives it creates and the geographical and historical context it sits within, but also to broadcast the lived experience of that violence.

The root of structural violence is conflict studies, first defined in Johan Galtung's article "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research" (1969). One of Galtung's initial efforts here is to offer a fundamental definition for both violence and peace. In doing so he divides violence into two categories: personal or direct violence which is perpetuated by an individual actor, and structural or indirect violence, which is perpetuated by an institution. Though personal violence often takes the form of physical, psychological, social, or other forms of direct abuse perpetuated by an individual against another individual, Galtung argues for the existence of "structural" violence as a distinct form which manifests itself as unequal access to the "power to decide" over the distribution of resources, particularly resources necessary for human survival. Structural violence may therefore not involve one person directly harming another, which contrasts with normal perceptions of what violence is. Structural violence is not necessarily bloodshed, though it can include bloodshed; instead it is unequal access to power over one's own ability to meet one's most vital needs.

Anthropologists in particular have developed structural violence into a field of research and politics accompanied by a particular way of looking at problems and applied this methodology to a number of global challenges. Paul Farmer (1996) outlines his particular structural violence approach, claiming that a researcher must understand both individual experience and the macro-level contexts within which such experience falls. Farmer argues that structural violence research must be both geographically broad so that it may account for the increasing interconnectivity of a globalising world, and historically deep to facilitate the analysis of structurally violent institutions and other large-scale forces that will have developed over time. This breadth and depth can then be connected to individual experience at a very fine level of detail. Farmer demonstrates the application of these principles throughout his research into structural violence in AIDS infection and political violence in Haiti (Farmer 2004; Castro and Farmer 2005; Farmer et al 2006). Here he examines the interaction of global economies going back as far as the Age of Mercantilism to identify the genesis of patterns of structural violence that continue today. He then connects these macro-level forces to personal narratives taken from contemporary interviews. Farmer gives voice to his participants, who communicate tales of violence that have historical and institutional causes. Research on structural violence, according to Farmer's procedure, must take place at two extremes: on an exceptionally broad macro-level, examining long chronologies and vast geographies, and on an exceptionally fine micro-level, relating personal experience through individual narrative.

Farmer (1996) defines structural violence in terms of his own research, thus:

...Analysis must, first, be geographically broad. As noted, the world as we know it is becoming increasingly interconnected. A corollary of this belief is that extreme suffering – especially when on a grand scale, as in genocide – is seldom divorced from the actions of the powerful. The analysis must also be historically deep ...deep enough to remember that modern day Haitians are the descendants of a people kidnapped from Africa in order to provide us with sugar, coffee, and cotton and to enrich a few in a mercantilist economy. (page 274)

Though the violence theorised to have been committed against the participants of this research is not genocidal, the lesson to consider the problem in terms of geography and history is well received for this research, and as will be discussed in the coming chapters, has born fruit.

The research of Philippe Bourgois is another example of the elements of structural violence employed in anthropology. Bourgois (2002) uses individual narrative to communicate structural violence done to individuals, though he does so through the use of ethnographic “thick description.” “In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio” describes Bourgois’ research in East Harlem, Manhattan, where he becomes close friends with street-level merchants dealing in the drug trade as well as the people with which they interact. He demonstrates how, though these people manifest a range of social ills and are engaged in illegal trade, their activities frequently replicate the way legitimate economies are run and are often motivated by their illicit connections to legitimate society. “Righteous Dopefiend” (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009) likewise explores the life of marginalised people,

this time with homeless heroin addicts in San Francisco. It shows the terrible conditions under which these people live, the decisions they make that make themselves vulnerable, and how they are victims of larger institutions and changes in the economy and society. Like Farmer, Bourgois' analysis takes place on two levels: first by providing an evocative personal narrative, then by connecting that narrative to macro-level forces that have been at work for a long time.

Scheper-Hughes is another author that makes use of structural violence. "Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil" (1993) and "Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics: Mental Illness in Rural Ireland" (2001) reinforce the usefulness of how applying structural violence to better understand macro-level factors can lead to undesirable circumstances. Frequently institutions do damage to people, without intending to do so.

Structural violence has not, however, been limited to anthropology in its application. In his book "Violence: a Reflection on the National Epidemic", James Gilligan (1997) demonstrates the applicability of structural violence as advocated by Farmer. However, instead of examining structural violence in the developing world or illegal contexts as other authors have done, Gilligan does so in mainstream American society. He uses individual narrative to explore structural violence caused by institutions such as education, the family, and the economy. The most defining characteristic of Gilligan's work is the empathy he inspires in readers. This skilled portrayal of experience provides the work with a sense of legitimacy, giving voice to individuals who have otherwise had none. Farmer (1996) acknowledges that this is one of the most solemn duties of the anthropologist.

The structural violence approach is not without its critics, however. Loïc Wacquant (2004), himself an ethnographer and sociologist specialising in urban marginality and violence (2008), argues that Farmer's delineation of "structural violence" is unnecessary and potentially harmful to our attempts at understanding violence in society. Though he agrees that social researchers should be reminded to ground themselves in the material, and that biological researchers would do well to remember that illness is a socially constructed phenomenon, Wacquant sees no value in focusing on structural violence exclusively. By doing so, a researcher must coalesce multiple forms of non-actor violence under this single heading, when these would, he argues, each be better analysed using methods developed for their own unique circumstances. Observe that there are multiple fields of violence studies that examine more specific categories of violence that could, under Farmer's definition, be categorised as structural (see for example, Bourdieu [1991] on symbolic violence or Sidanius and Pratto [2001] on social dominance theory). Each of these fields has developed more specific forms of analysis in order to examine the problems specific to their field, such as symbolic power (Bourdieu 1991) and the violence that can accompany it. Wacquant criticises structural violence for being too broad a categorisation of violence, and not specific enough in its application to be particularly useful.

There would appear to be some merit in this criticism, were one to consider structural violence to the exclusion of other understandings of violence. However, this research has sought not to apply structural violence exclusively, but rather to borrow the hallmark methodology that defines structural scholarship. These methods are two parts: first, to gain an understanding of the metaphorical violence

done to individuals by socio-economic movements through a relation of socio-economics to individual experience; and second, to clarify and amplify these experiences to allow victims of structural violence to advocate for themselves, to the rest of society. Structural violence is unique in the way that it connects large scale changes in society to patterns of individual powerlessness via the medium of experience, then seeking to give voice to these experiences. It is this methodology which this research has sought to emulate, rather than the exclusive definitions of violence proposed by Galtung and criticised by Wacquant as insufficient to encapsulate all non-actor violence.

By comparing the work of the structural violence scholars above, it is possible to identify the characteristics of structural violence scholarship and attempt to apply them in the study of social housing allocation. These defining elements are contextual understanding of the development of housing, and qualitative, experience-based research into the effects thereof. Research in housing studies has been carried out to a large extent investigating the experience of applicants to social rented housing, however much of this focused on the experiences of marginalised groups (Ratcliffe 1999), and the middle-class occupiers of social rented housing (see Watt 2006) with the objective of describing potential discrimination in housing. Experience-based research in social housing has largely not engaged with the broader systems of allocation that do harm to all applicants regardless of their distinguishing characteristics. Likewise, though the dwindling supply of social rented housing has been a subject of significant discussion, these investigations have been largely quantitative in nature (see Dorling 2014) because of the relative availability of applicant and housing numbers. This intersection

between applicant experience, the scarcity of social rented housing, and changing methods of social housing allocation is therefore fertile territory for a structural violence-style investigation.

Before carrying out experience-based research to connect macro-level forces to individual narrative, Farmer and Bourgois exemplify the necessity of understanding the historical, social, and economic context of the broad field being studied. In this example, that would be the development of the state's responsibility first in regulating, then providing housing.

The first official legislation in the United Kingdom requiring government involvement in housing was the Public Health Act of 1848. In response to poor living conditions in Victorian slums, central government required that councils help to improve public health by regulating housing (Szreter 1998). Authorities had little power to enforce their ordinances, however, until the Working Class Act of 1885 empowered them with the right to demolish properties that were deemed unsuitable for habitation – but not yet to build new homes in its place. The Housing of the Working Class Act was updated and expanded in 1890, 1900 and 1903, before being superseded by the Town and Planning Act of 1919, which then required local authorities to use central government funds to develop social rented housing for the working class and veterans returning from the Great War (Wilding 1973). Such housing was the first time the United Kingdom government provided social rented housing on a large scale, though the social housing institutions developed at this time were small compared to those that were to come.

The housing that arose from this legislation was primarily targeted at working and middle-class households, usually composed of detached and semi-

detached dwellings built in large suburbs known as cottage estates and row houses in more urbanised areas (Burnett 1980). The romantic return to an idealised agrarian past that motivated planners to design the garden cities of 1920's failed, however, to produce the desired atmosphere. These social rented housing suburbs, populated by working class beneficiaries, were lonely and desolate, lacked the sense of community that had characterised the urban centres most of these workers had come from, and were far from the industrial jobs they relied upon (Bayliss 2001). The Housing Act of 1930 would expand the role of local authorities from housing the working class to housing poor people as well, requiring slum clearance and the rehousing of residents in suburban social rented housing estates, or "cottage estates."

The Second World War stopped the construction of new housing as Britain's industrial output turned towards wartime manufacturing. The Blitz destroyed a significant portion of British housing stock, and as a result the UK government stepped in after the war to provide as much housing as possible in as short a time as possible. This is the genesis of the stereotypical UK housing estate. To meet demand, planners and architects worked together to innovate the residential high-rise, the "tower blocks" that would become symbolic of British social rented housing. Using new construction materials such as reinforced concrete (Dunleavy 1981), new forms of infrastructure such as internal plumbing, and new architectural schools of thought such as modernism and brutalism, the landscape of residential space was transformed drastically. Although eventually manifesting a number of problems resulting from misguided design and planning (Hannay 1981), poor construction (Power 1999), and insufficient maintenance (Lowry 1991), this phase

of social rented housing provision is significant for burning into the public consciousness what “social housing” is. The provision of housing was one of the most significant elements of the Labour government’s welfare state (Hamnett 1993). Between the years of 1950 and 1970, council housing would continue to be a significant source of investment for the government as well as a central pillar of what citizens saw as a targeted benefit, available if they needed it.

The 1979 general election victory of the Conservative Party resulted in a shift in policy away from social rented housing provision which was composed of four elements. First, the Right to Buy allowed social tenants to purchase their dwellings from the government. Second, the central government reduced funding for the construction of new council houses. Third, central government reduced its subsidies dedicated to the maintenance of existing council houses. Fourth, the government implemented housing benefit to help pay private rents, rather than provide social dwellings (Hamnett 1993). The combined result of these policies has been a dramatic reduction in the resources available to local authorities to build and maintain social rented housing units, policies which were continued by the New Labour, Coalition, and new Conservative governments (Pawson 2006, Accounts 2013). Decades of reducing social rented housing funding have now left social rented housing denuded. In parallel to this reduction in overall resources are changes to the allocation of social rented housing discussed above. Little research has been carried out on the experiences of people applying to social rented housing in the face of these rapid changes.

Consulting structural violence literature has led to the question: “have reductions in the supply of social rented housing and changes to social rented

housing allocation harmed those seeking social rented housing, and if so how?”

Shelter is a fundamental human need. According to Farmer’s (1996) definition of structural violence, simply taking away a population’s access to such an essential resource does constitute structural violence, yet it also qualifies as structural violence because of the way in which it has been taken. The growing scarcity of social rented housing resources is a documented fact, yet the implementation of “choice-based lettings” and “the waiting list” imply that there are strategies other than simple need that an applicant can employ in pursuit of social rented housing. Yet these false strategies are doomed to failure, and such failures have had a significant negative impact on applicants to social rented housing. Part of the purpose of this research is to communicate the harm done to applicants, giving voice to the structural violence enacted against them by inappropriate allocation methodologies. This will be further explored in Chapter 6.

Conclusion of Literature Review

This research seeks to explore the lived experiences of applicants to social rented housing. This chapter has sought to identify the most critical elements of the social housing crisis, and how they sit within larger debates about targeted and universal social welfare. In identifying useful theoretical tools for this consideration, it has drawn primarily from three literary bodies: science, technology, and society; public administration; and structural violence. By applying approaches from each of these disciplines to existing social housing literature, several gaps have been identified that this research seeks to fill. The questions identified by this comparison between the chosen literatures and housing studies are:

- How do applicants experience the mechanisms of social rented housing allocation?
- What are the positive and negative aspects of rationalisation experienced by applicants to UK social rented housing today?
- Have reductions in the supply of social rented housing and changes to social rented housing allocation harmed those seeking social rented housing, and if so how?

The following chapter will define the methodology by which this research has sought to answer the above questions. Subsequent chapters will then describe the answers to the primary research question and these sub-questions.

Chapter 2:

Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology of this research in seeking to answer the identified research questions and to describe the reasoning behind the selection of this methodology. This research has identified the following primary research question which it seeks to answer: “how have changes to social rented housing provision and allocation in the last 30 years affected non-emergency Londoners’ experience of applying for social rented housing today?” In addition to this, this thesis had identified in the previous chapter three sub-questions arising from several literatures. This research therefore also seeks to answer the questions:

- How do applicants experience the mechanisms of social rented housing allocation?
- What are the positive and negative aspects of rationalisation experienced by applicants to UK social rented housing today?
- Have reductions in the supply of social rented housing and changes to social rented housing allocation harmed those seeking social rented housing, and if so how?

To answer these questions, the researcher interviewed 50 applicants to a housing association’s London-specific waiting lists. Interviews were semi-structured around ten questions aimed at accessing the narrated experience of participating applicants in both their overall housing history and the history of their application(s) to social rented housing. The interview question guide was developed

around the research questions identified above to directly address the issues taken up in this research. Interviews usually lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were recorded, then transcribed. Transcripts were then analysed and coded to develop common themes of experience about applicants' housing and social housing histories. The four most significant themes identified in this process form the structure for the remainder of this thesis, each theme being dealt with in a subsequent chapter. The process by which each of these steps have been undertaken will be described in further detail below.

This chapter will also seek to explain the reasoning behind each of the choices made in developing this methodology. In achieving this, this chapter will attempt to make explicit the theoretical assumptions from which this methodology has been designed, discuss the contingent nature of the data chosen, and address the non-random nature of the cases selected. Obtaining the data used in this research has been the subject of good fortune on the part of the researcher. This has caused the research results to be less replicable, but of a more unique and possibly valuable insight. The researcher made use of targeted, rather than random participant recruitment methods to focus on social rented housing in places of scarcity in both the private and social rented tenures. In doing so, research results are more difficult to generalise to the housing climate of the UK as a whole, but more representative of London and the Southeast where scarcity in rented social and private housing is the prevailing norm. Many of the methodological choices made in designing this research presented subsequent ethical considerations, but none more so than the employer-employee relationship that existed between the gatekeeper organisation and the researcher. These, and other methodological and

ethical considerations will be the subject of much of this chapter and will be dealt with in the order in which research was executed.

Broadly speaking, this research has sought to make a unique contribution to the field of housing studies by employing a qualitative approach to the problems of social rented housing allocation and, specifically, the needs of non-emergency, rather than emergency applicants. This research has sought to tell the human stories of people as they struggle to gain social rented housing, in an environment where this is almost impossible for them because they are not emergency cases.

As discussed in the previous chapter, this research has sought to emulate many structural violence scholars in its approach to gathering and analysing qualitative data and communicating narrative (see Bourgois 2002 and 2009; Farmer 2004). It has sought to make use of the experiences of applicants to social rented housing as a valuable method to assess the functions of social rented housing in current times. Structural violence calls for a comparison between a geographically broad yet historically deep context and the narrated experience of the individual. This allows one to make connections between macro forces and the micro impacts of those forces as experienced by the person or family. In adopting this approach, previous chapters have attempted to establish the greater context within which UK social rented housing sits. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the specific methods by which this qualitative data was collected. Future chapters will then communicate the findings of this methodology, again in accordance with the guiding principles of structural violence by attempting to give voice to the experiences narrated by participants and to set those narratives into a larger historical and geographical context, which most participants lacked a knowledge of.

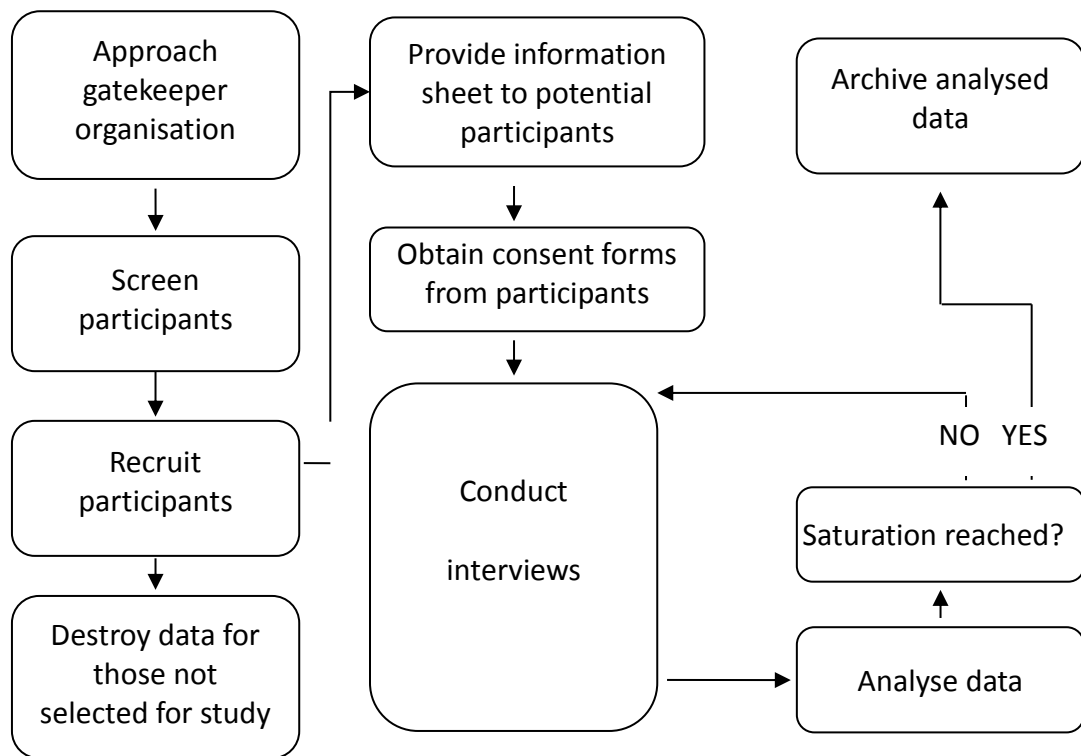
This study also sought to explore several ideas raised specifically by Brown and King in 2005, regarding effective choice in social rented housing. They theorised that without the power to effectively choose their housing, the greater implementation of choice in UK social housing allocation would only cause frustration. An exploration of this idea with actual applicants of social rented housing requires a qualitative approach, and so one was selected.

Structural violence is ethnographic in origin, and while this research is not ethnography, it does seek to emulate some ethnographic elements to achieve the goals described above. In particular, the re-communication of individual narratives of struggle against wider economic, social, and political systems is one of the goals of this research. These narratives will be shared along thematic lines, in the following four chapters.

Description of Methodology

Research proceeded as outlined in the flowchart below (see Figure 1). Each of these processes will be described in more detail below.

Figure 1: Flowchart of Research



Approach Gatekeeper Organisation

This research has been undertaken with the cooperation of Habinteg Housing Association, a national social housing provider with approximately 3,500 homes in England, Scotland and Wales that specialises in the provision of and advocacy for housing for disabled and ageing people. Habinteg operates a waiting list model for their social housing stock. Habinteg is one of the few housing associations the researcher has interacted with that continue to let homes using a waiting list. Because of their continued maintenance of an active social rented housing waiting list, Habinteg was an ideal organisation with which to work for this research. Choice-based lettings schemes, which are significantly larger institutions than the waiting lists of individual housing associations, would not have been likely to be so receptive to cooperating with this research given their size, the direct role

they play in governance, and the private nature of the contact details being requested. The researcher therefore approached Habinteg, as a gateway organisation, with a request to contact social rented housing applicants on their waiting list for recruitment to this research.

The researcher had the good fortune to be directly employed by Habinteg for nearly two years at the time this request was made, and therefore could capitalise on good standing within management to argue for the organisation's involvement with this research. With relatively little persuasion required, Habinteg agreed and released the complete contact details of active applicants on all their waiting lists throughout England, Scotland, and Wales. The employer-employee relationship between the researcher and the gatekeeper organisation, however, presents two methodological problems: the first is the positionality of researcher and participant; the second is the difficulty with which this research can be replicated.

First, the dual role of the researcher as both employee of the gatekeeper organisation and independent academic carrying out research for a doctoral thesis might have compromised the objectivity of the academic and the traditional freedom of the participant to speak freely. Furthermore, Habinteg was unlikely to sponsor research that might be perceived as negative towards them. To address this potential problem, initial conversations taking place between the researcher and gatekeeper organisation highlighted the fact that the research being undertaken was not specific to Habinteg; rather Habinteg's permitted use of their waiting list was a method to gain access to applicants' experiences about social rented housing and social rented housing allocation as a whole. Criticisms specific to Habinteg were

therefore undesirable for the researcher, and to be avoided if possible in favour of more generalised results. This of course suited the gatekeeper organisation very well. Research questions, described below, were designed to access broad topics about social housing and allocation, not operational problems in the specific, gateway organisation.

To further protect the researcher from both the ramifications of the research being conducted, as well as from direct oversight from Habinteg, both parties agreed that for the purposes of this research project the researcher would be treated as independent from the company rather than an employee of Habinteg. Both parties agreed that there would be no oversight of the research project by Habinteg, and that recruitment letters would include the researcher's King's College, London contact information rather than their Habinteg contact information.

This, however, raised a further ethical consideration. Habinteg had acquired the contact details of the applicants on their waiting list not for research, but for the allocation of social rented housing to them. Contacting households for research was therefore somewhat morally questionable, as many of these individuals might view such contact as intrusive particularly if it came from an outside organisation without their consent, and particularly given the emotional nature of the topic being discussed. To address this issue while maintaining the division between independent researcher and gatekeeper organisation, Habinteg and the researcher agreed that recruitment letters be written by the researcher as an independent academic, on university-headed paper – as required by King's College ethics regulation – but be distributed to the applicants on the waiting list by a senior

Habinteg employee. Of course, this too presented the further difficulty that potential participants might view the researcher as completely unaffiliated with the gatekeeper organisation. To avoid giving this perception, recruitment letters explicitly stated the nature of the relationship between Habinteg as the employer of the researcher, but also explained that this research was being undertaken independently from Habinteg under the guidance of King's College. This was done in the plainest language possible.

The researcher's positionality might also have compromised the likelihood of participants to speak freely about the gatekeeper organisation in two ways. First, participants might seek a perceived advantage by participating in the belief that doing so would earn them a formal or informal preference in their application to social rented housing. To avoid this potential problem, it was made explicit in the participant recruitment letter that: participation or non-participation in this research would not have any effect whatsoever on a participant or nonparticipant's application process; that the participation or nonparticipation of those contacted for this research would not be communicated back to Habinteg in any way; and that the researcher had no role to play in the allocation process. The recruitment process, in short, was kept entirely from Habinteg, who had no way of knowing which applicants on their waiting list had participated in the research and which did not. These facts were made explicit in the recruitment and further reiterated to participants when obtaining their consent prior to the start of each interview. Second, the positionality of the researcher might have inclined participants to speak positively about the gatekeeper organisation again to curry the favour of the researcher as a strategy to forward one's housing application. In addition to the

measures taken above to disassociate participation in this research from participants' housing applications, the researcher also sought to make clear in the recruitment letter to potential participants that the research to be carried out was not on behalf of Habinteg itself, but rather about social rented housing and the methods by which it is allocated. This focus away from Habinteg, and towards the bigger picture, was likewise reiterated when the researcher obtained signed consent from participants. To the researcher's knowledge, every potential participant understood these points prior to taking part, or declining to take part, in the research.

Second, the good fortune of the researcher in having unique access to a quality gatekeeper might be damaging to the replicability of the study. The researcher has been uniquely placed in gaining access to the participants of this research. Without already having some influence within Habinteg, an outside researcher would have difficulty convincing the gatekeeper organisation to grant access to the contact details of applicants on its waiting list. These contact details were, after all, private information and there was a very limited amount of pushback during recruitment from contacted parties expressing discontent that their details had been shared. The waiting list held by Habinteg, as a research resource, was singular because of the access granted to the researcher as an employee. The data presented in this thesis would therefore be difficult to replicate again with another partner organisation, unless the researcher again had some influence to wield. This does not, however, compromise the value of the qualitative data presented here; indeed, the very nature of qualitative data is that it is singular and therefore difficult to replicate. Part of the reason this research has been able to

produce unique results is the unique access to data that the researcher's good fortune in employment has brought about. However, it is still worth noting that it would not be easy to recreate this method of recruitment within another housing association, let alone a larger organisation such as a local authority.

The selection of a housing association waiting list from which to draw participants also presents a further methodological consideration about the population of people who apply to housing associations versus the population that apply to local authority choice-based lettings schemes. The fragmentation of social rented housing resources, discussed in the introduction to this thesis and the literature review, has been a significant problem for social rented housing provision. Although research has not been carried out to assess how many people apply to both housing associations and the local authority, it is perhaps logical to conclude that people will be more inclined to apply at their local authority for social rented housing than at a housing association, because it is at the local authority that people have traditionally applied. Though again there is no data available on the crossover between applicants, local authorities do attempt to direct applicants to housing associations within their jurisdiction (see Hackney 2016 for example). They are likely not successful in all cases in referring people to housing associations. The consequence arising from this is that the population interviewed for this research, which is drawn from a housing association waiting list, are likely to be the more resourceful group for having been successfully referred to the association and therefore not entirely representative of the larger population of social rented housing applicants. The reverse, however, does not hold true: almost all applicants interviewed had applied to their local authorities' choice-based lettings schemes, in

addition to Habinteg Housing Association. This has been a boon for this research because it has made the comparison between choice-based lettings and waiting lists easier, but it is important to note that the individuals interviewed here probably represent a more skilled group of applicants than those that apply at their local authorities alone.

The complications arising from the employer-employee relationship between gatekeeper and researcher, as well as the ramifications of choosing participants from a housing association waiting list being taken into careful consideration, the researcher went on to successfully acquire access to Habinteg's waiting list. Participants were then recruited from this list using specific methods of screening and selection, which will be discussed next.

Participant Screening

Because this research seeks to follow a qualitative method of semi-structured interviews to explore the uniqueness of individual experience as a source of validity, rather than generalisability, a purposive process was selected in the recruitment of participants (Sandelowski 1995). The aim of this was to obtain a wider range of experiences based on recruiting for a few selected categories. The next task of this research was therefore to decide who from the Habinteg waiting list to attempt to recruit. When this research began, the Habinteg waiting list had approximately 1,300 individual households registered on it. These were divided into two groups: approximately the first 300 were households who had requested preferential treatment due to a medical disability of one of the household's members. Habinteg maintained a separate list for these households because they

have a high proportion of properties adapted for disabled people, given their specialisation on that kind of housing. The other 1,000 households registered on their waiting lists were in search of what are called “general needs” housing, which are not specifically adapted for someone with a disability and which would not in general be appropriate for a disabled person. This research sought participants from both the 1,000 general needs applicants as well as the 300 disabled applicants. Because disabled applicants have specialised housing that is often reserved for them and also receive preferential treatment in the allocation process, it might be argued that their perspectives on social rented housing and the systems by which it is allocated are not generalisable to the broader population of social rented housing applicants. However, many disabled people were not always so, and therefore can and often did give unique insights into the allocation methods of previous eras. Indeed, this research has sought the perspectives of older people in particular because of this insight; to select against disability would have also reduced the population of potential elderly participants which compromised a significant data source for this research. On the other hand, to select only from the disabled population would have biased the results in a way that would not be generalisable to the wider population of social rented housing applicants. Therefore, this research has taken the middle road of not distinguishing between disabled and non-disabled participants. Thus the proportion of disabled to non-disabled households interviewed was somewhat near to the 300:1,000 mark. 18 participants were interviewed from a disabled waiting list; 32 from a general needs list. It is important to note that amongst those 18 households with disabled members, none of their disabilities had been prioritised highly enough to warrant

their immediate housing. Therefore, they still fall into the category of non-emergency applicant with which this research is primarily concerned.

Although the methodology described here did not seek to distinguish between disabled and non-disabled applicants to social rented housing, it has applied several other pre-selection criteria in its recruitment of participants. The first and most important of these selection criteria was a geographical limitation placed on participants selected. This research only sought to interview those applicants on the Habinteg waiting list who both lived in London at the time the research was undertaken, and were also applying for social rented housing within London. There were two reasons for this limitation. The first reason is that London is the largest housing market in the UK, for all tenures including private- and socially-rented. There are more social rented housing units in London than anywhere, yet because of its large population as well as its deindustrialised past it is also the place with the greatest scarcity in social rented housing as expressed by the number of people who apply for social rented housing (see the Literature Review, also DCLG 2016b). This makes it the most interesting geography for the purposes of this research, which seeks to question applicants' experiences of growing scarcity in social rented housing and changing methods of social rented housing allocation. The second reason to select London as the site for this research is logistical. Predictably, the density of applicants on Habinteg's waiting list was highest in London by far. More potential participants would ease both the burden of recruitment, as well as the burden of carrying out interviews. For these reasons, potential participants were limited to those living and applying for social rented housing in London.

Within this population of London residents applying to social rented housing at Habinteg Housing Association, several further criteria were also applied in support of the research goals of this project. In order of importance these criteria were: time spent waiting for social rented housing, borough of residence, and age. In cases where applicants expressed similar such characteristics, random sampling was originally intended to choose to whom recruitment letters would be sent, however this proved unnecessary as there were no such instances occurring. Each element used to select potential participants will now be the object of discussion.

The most significant factor considered during recruitment was the length of time potential participants had spent on Habinteg's waiting list. An increase in waiting time before being able to access a social property is one of the primary outcomes of social rented housing policy change over the last 30 years. Exploring the effects of this increased waiting time is therefore one of the primary purposes of this research. As such, it was necessary to obtain the participation of individuals with varying waiting times. Applicant outlook on housing allocation policies was deemed likely to degrade as time spent on the waiting list increased, and qualitatively this was indeed determined to be the case. Those participants that spent more time waiting to be allocated a property were more likely to hold a negative perspective of social rented housing and their allocation systems, while those who had waited less time often had more positive outlooks. To account for this, participants were recruited from three groups. The first group was those who had applied for social rented housing only within the last year; the second was those who had been on the waiting list for between one and five years; and the third was those who had been on the waiting list for five or more years. As the

primary characteristic by which participants were recruited, this research set out to acquire the participation of 20 applicants from each time category, in keeping with Guest, Bunce, and Johnson's (2006) and Sandelowski's (1995) estimate of 20 participants required to reach data saturation in a qualitative study. Unfortunately, there were relatively few applicants on the waiting list that were on it for less than a year, while the response rate of applicants on the list for greater than five years was considerably lower than the other two groups. Of the 50 participants recruited for this project, 13 were drawn from the newest group; 21 from the middle group; and 16 from the oldest group. This research therefore failed to meet its goal of an even distribution of 20 participants in each group, but did acquire enough participants to achieve significant results.

The second factor considered during recruitment was the age of participants. Welfare reform and other socio-economic changes may be encouraging many older households to apply for social rented housing at a time when it is more difficult than ever to access it. Individuals within these households may have had a unique outlook on methods of social housing allocation because of experiences that had taken place during different social rented housing eras. Meanwhile, younger individuals may have had lowered expectations of social rented housing resulting from experience solely with rationed – perhaps severely rationed – systems of allocation. Narratives from different age groups were therefore identified as useful in exploring the effects of social rented housing policy change. To access these varying narratives potential participants were further subdivided amongst three groups: those born in or after 1985; those born between 1963 and 1984, inclusive; and those born in or before 1962. After achieving an even

distribution of participants based on time spent on the waiting list and borough of residence, recruitment then focused on attaining an even distribution amongst these three age-based groups. The first age-based category was those aged 52 or older, and corresponds to the first, relatively provisional era of social rented housing as governed by the Labour government prior to 1980. 12 participants were drawn from this age group. The second age category was composed of those aged 29-51, and corresponds to the second, more rationed era of social rented housing as established by Thatcher's Conservative government starting in 1980. 22 participants were drawn from this age group. The third age category was those aged 18-28, and corresponded to the third, current era of social rented housing that is dominated by the choice-based lettings policies established by New Labour and carried forward throughout the Coalition and Conservative governments (Pawson and Hulse 2011). 16 participants were taken from this age group.

Third in significance during recruitment was the borough in which participants lived, and therefore were likely to have applied for social rented housing. Where possible, participants were selected from the same or nearby boroughs to provide more consistency in narrative between cases. Initially this research had sought a roughly equal distribution of participants amongst the boroughs participants were drawn from. However, this proved problematic because of inconsistent response rates between applicants from different boroughs and unequal responses from individuals of different application tenure and age. In short, there was a significant conflict between recruiting for tenure/age and recruiting for borough. Because the allocation policies of many London boroughs employ similar mechanisms and because they are all under similar pressure of

scarcity, and because the age of applicants was determined to be a more important characteristic to recruit for, the researcher decided to de-emphasise the importance of borough during the recruitment process. Thus, participants were less geographically clustered than originally intended, and as such the specific allocation policies of certain local authorities is not a significant theme of this research.

Although most participants were drawn from the boroughs of Southwark (approximately 55,000 social houses), Hackney (approximately 46k), Tower Hamlets(43k), Islington (42k), Greenwich (36k), Haringey (27k), and Hammersmith and Fulham (26k), which together represent less than one quarter of all social homes in London (DCLG 2016a), participants were selected from all over the Greater London area. Therefore, the experiences presented in this research are less representative of individual boroughs, as originally hoped for, and more representative of Londoners' experiences more broadly.

The screening of potential applicants made use of the above criteria in selecting potential participants to be contacted for recruitment. To reiterate, the Habinteg waiting list was first reduced to those applicants both living in London and applying for social rented housing in London. These applicants were further divided by tenure on the waiting list, age, and borough of residence. Potential participants were then contacted and recruited using these criteria.

Recruitment Process

150 initial recruitment letters were mailed to potential participants. Recruitment letters provided potential participants with the researcher's King's College email address and telephone number, but were sent by Habinteg itself for

privacy reasons described above. When participants contacted the researcher, a brief telephone conversation provided additional information about the research. If the contacted party was interested in participating after this informative conversation, the researcher scheduled an interview at a time and place of the participant's choosing. Participants were then mailed information sheets in advance of the interview. Information sheets specified that despite the employer-employee relationship that the researcher and gateway organisation had, participation in this research was considered an independent activity for both researcher and participant. Habinteg would not be informed of the contacted party's participation or non-participation, nor could the researcher affect the participant's social rented housing application in any way. These points were reiterated in person prior to all interviews. To the researcher's knowledge, all participants understood these points.

Of the initial 150 recruitment letters, 50 each were sent to contacts with long, moderate, and short wait times as described above, further subdivided as possible amongst selected boroughs and age groups. The first round of recruitment letters yielded only 28 participants, a sufficient number to begin the interviewing process yet not enough to complete all research. While these initial 28 interviews were being carried out, then, a second wave of 150 recruitment letters were sent to find new participants. This second wave yielded a further 22 interviews. During this second wave of interviews the researcher began to feel as though the same themes were repeating themselves without many significantly new themes emerging, thereby indicating that the research was nearing qualitative data saturation. The researcher therefore determined that the 50 interviews that had been completed

or scheduled at that time were sufficient for the purposes of this research, and ceased recruitment activities.

Interviews most commonly took place in the participant's residence, or less frequently in a public place. On the day of the interview, participants signed a consent form indicating their understanding of the project, the separation between the researcher and the gatekeeper organisation, and all information contained on the information sheet. The consent form also discussed several supplemental points concerning the audio recording of interviews, the privacy of the information participants gave during the interview and their right to withdraw from the project at any time during the interview or up to one month after the interview was completed. No participants elected to withdraw their narratives after having given them.

Prior to each interview, the interviewer again reminded the participant of several key ethical issues: first, the interviewer was an employee of the housing association that the participant had applied to; second, that the research the participant was being interviewed for was for a completely independent project; third, their consent or decline to participate in this research would have no bearing whatsoever on their application to social rented housing; and fourth, all information gleaned during the interview, including the interviewed person's very participation or nonparticipation in the interview, would be kept completely confidential, and they would be made unidentifiable in any research outputs. The interviewer then asked the participant to sign the consent form, and recruitment of individual participants was considered complete with the participant's signing of that form after again having the ethical issues explained to them. At that point, the

researcher commenced with the interview. It appeared that all participants understood the role of the researcher as independent of the housing association and understood that the information they gave would not have any bearing upon their application for social rented housing. It appeared that all participants maintained this understanding throughout all interviews.

Data Collection – Interviews

Data collection for this research was in the form of semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allowed for significant exploration of emergent themes, with enough time spent allowing for an increasingly emotional investment in the interview from participants. This yielded good results in the form of intimate narratives, yet was not so time-intensive on the part of the researcher to limit the study to a handful of individuals. Indeed, the limited time spent with each interview allowed there to be 50 participants from across London. A more ethnographic approach, focusing on deeper narratives from fewer participants, would have precluded this, relatively high level of participation. Though structural violence itself is often ethnographic in the way it carries its work out, due to time constraints this research did not seek to emulate this part of structural violence, and instead attempt to establish this close connection with participants in a shorter period. For the most part, this effort was successful. More time with participants would no doubt have yielded additional narrative, and also given the study a more longitudinal bent, but given the time limitation of the research window, this did not seem reasonable.

Interviews were scheduled at a time and place that was convenient to the participant. Most took place in their home; some took place in a public setting. The majority were audio-recorded with the consent of the participant. Interviews lasted approximately 60-90 minutes and took place in three phases: the acclimation phase, the explorative phase, and the closing phase. Each of these will be described below. This method was adapted using advice from several sources, including Weiss 1995, Warren 2002 and Turner 2010.

First, the *acclimation phase* eased participants into the interviewing process by asking open-ended questions aimed at accomplishing two objectives: to make the interviewee comfortable with the researcher and to introduce them to the process of answering unstructured questions about their experience with social rented housing allocations. As this phase continued, and participants become more comfortable with the process, questions became more explorative in nature and eventually came to discuss topics related to the participant's experience with social housing allocation without directly addressing any of the topics presented in the topic guide. Actual questions asked varied on a case-by-case basis dictated by the flow of conversation, however some example questions that might be asked during this phase include some of the below. These questions are not designed to elicit a response that conveys experience that is directly relevant to this research, though they may incidentally do so. Instead, they are designed to get the participant talking comfortably and to acclimate them to the kinds of thinking that are desirable in answering open-ended questions about housing and housing need.

- *Could you tell me a little bit about the organisation of your household?*

- *How is your application to social housing going so far?*
- *I am unsure as to how the process of applying to social housing goes from the applicant's perspective; could you tell me how you go about it?*

Once the interviewee was both comfortable with the interviewing process and with the interviewer, the interview entered the *explorative phase*. During this phase questions were asked from the topic guide, below. One potential trigger for shifting into the explorative phase was the production of relevant data without questions from the topic guide being asked; another was laughter or other emotive responses that signalled that rapport between researcher and participant had been established. Because interviews were semi-structured, questions were not asked in a specific order. Instead, they were asked as topics were introduced by the flow of conversation between interviewer and interviewee. The aim of this process is to ask all questions on the topic guide by the end of the interview, but to do so in a way that elicits a more natural and unguided response from the participant than if a more rigid structure were imposed on the interview.

The topic guide was prepared using the research questions identified in previous chapters as guidance, and is reproduced below.

1. *What is the history of your application to social housing?*
2. *What needs does your household have that qualify it for social housing?*
3. *How would you describe the "social housing waiting list?"*
4. *How has the wait for social housing affected your household, if at all?*

5. *What do you have to do in your application to social housing?*
6. *If you apply to multiple housing organisations, how do their application processes differ?*
7. *How would you describe your relationship with social housing organisations and their staff?*
8. *How does renting privately affect your household, if it does?*
9. *What are your thoughts on relocating to another area to secure more affordable housing?*
10. *How have recent changes to benefits affected your household, if at all?*

The topic guide, coupled with the rapport built during the acclimation phase, was largely successful in coaxing narrative from participants. In most cases interviewees related their personal experiences with social rented housing and allocations with relatively little prompting.

Throughout the interviewing process, supplemental questions were asked to encourage participants to provide more information about experiences conveyed. These questions are known as probes and prompts. Probes are meant to explore a topic briefly touched upon during an interview, taking a tangential comment as an opportunity to explore a theme that has otherwise not been discussed during that interview. Probes can take many forms or be employed in many ways. Some examples of probes that were used during the interviews carried out for this research were:

- *“You spoke a moment ago about XXX, would you mind going into a little more detail about that please?”*

- *“That’s a very interesting point, can we pause this discussion for a moment to talk a little more about this topic? We can come back in a moment.”*
- *“Let me get all of these down first, and then we can return to each one and go into more detail.”*

Prompts, on the other hand, were used when a participant had stopped talking about a topic – or even talking at all – but the interviewer felt that there was more information to be gleaned. A prompt might be direct, for example by asking them to continue speaking on an issue, or indirect, for example by simply remaining silent. Some prompts used throughout this project were:

- *“Go on.”*
- *“This is very interesting point. Could you go into more detail about XXX?”*
- *<silence>*

The most significant goal of this semi-structured form of interview was to build rapport with the individual as the interview continues, and to make use of that rapport to gain access to increasingly personal and potent experiences. Prompts, probes, and follow up questions were used as tools to build and maintain rapport, to better access participant experience. These efforts were structured around the topic guide, which gave the interviews direction when they lacked it.

Field notes were taken throughout interviews to help organise the interview itself as well as focus data analysis at a later stage. These notes were used in three ways. First, because experiences are likely to be branching in nature, field notes were useful for keeping track of new conversation topics for exploration as

interviews continued. This was accomplished by keeping a flowchart of each interview and adding branches as new topics were broached. Second, because obtaining an accurate understanding of an applicant's housing history is integral to contextualising their experiences with social housing allocation, field notes were used to record a timeline of each participant's housing history. Third, field notes were used to highlight particularly interesting experiences narrated by participants as potential themes for analysis in the broader context of multiple interviews.

Once all the questions on the interview topic guide had been asked and all probes developing from those narratives fully explored, the interviews moved into the *closing phase*. This focused on de-escalating the nature of the conversation and discussing any closing points that the participant wished to make. For example:

- *You've seen the kind of questions I've asked you so far. But you're the expert, it's your story... Based on the conversation we've had, do you think there's anything you can share with me that I would want to know, yet haven't asked about?*
- *Are there any experiences in your application to social housing that have stood out to you that we haven't discussed today?*
- *Do you have any questions for me about our interview?*

To signal the end of the interview, participants were thanked for their time and audio recording was ceased. Participants were encouraged to contact the researcher again with any questions or to withdraw their data from the research, though none exercised this option.

This interview methodology elected to interview each participant once only. Given the limited time within which these interviews were carried out, the scarcity

of social rented housing vacancies, and the fact that participants were not usually categorised as high priority, it was unlikely that many would be housed by the time the research phase of this project concluded. Therefore, rather than attempt to incorporate a longitudinal aspect to this research when such work would be unlikely to bear fruit, this project elected to interview participants once. At the same time, the researcher encouraged participants to contact the researcher again if their housing circumstances changed for the better or for the worse. No participants did so. Most of the applicants will have remained on the Habinteg waiting list for several years if not more, therefore this was not a surprise.

Interviews were conducted, transcribed and analysed until qualitative data saturation was achieved. This can be said to have taken place when new interviews no longer produce new and significant themes. Although it is still possible for new interviews to generate new themes, the reduced frequency of new themes renders continued research not cost-beneficial. The return on effort invested in transcribing and analysing new interviews had diminished enough after 45 interviews that it no longer seemed reasonable to continue with the process. The interviews had produced a rich series of experiences that appeared to connect in multiple ways that were meaningful to the research questions posed above. The researcher therefore determined to finish the interviews that were already scheduled, bringing the total participant count to 50, before concluding the data gathering phase of this project. Qualitative data saturation occurred at for this research at approximately 45 interviews; a further 5 interviews were completed after this because they had already been scheduled, for a total of 50 qualitative interviews carried out for this

research. Interviews were conducted in the summer and fall of 2014. The table below provides some essential information on participants:

Table 2: Participant Information

#	Time on Waiting List	Tenure	Borough	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Occupation	Disabled?
1	2 years	Private rent, sharing with strangers	Southwark	Late 20s	Man	Black	Store clerk	No
2	2 years	Private rent, sharing with family	Wandsworth	Mid 40s	Woman	Black	Cleaner	No
3	<1 year	Private rent, sharing with strangers	Hammersmith	Early 20s	Man	White	Store clerk	Yes
4	5 years	Private rent, sharing with strangers	Greenwich	Late 20s	Man	White	Clerical	Yes
5	5 years	Private rent, sharing with strangers	Haringey	Mid 30s	Man	Black	Construction	No
6	2 years	Private rent, not sharing	Merton	Late 30s	Woman	White	Food service and cleaner	No
7	<1 year	Living with family that own	Barking & Dagenham	Early 30s	Man	White	Mechanic	No
8	5 years	Private rent, sharing with friends	Newham	Mid 50s	Man	White	None	No
9	<1 year	Private rent, not sharing	Tower Hamlets	Mid 20s	Woman	Asian	Store clerk	No
10	<1 year	Living with family that own	Enfield	Early 50s	Woman	Black	Unknown	Yes
11	<1 year	Social rent, sharing with family	Haringey	Mid 20s	Man	Black	Construction	No
12	2 years	Social rent, single household	Southwark	Mid 70s	Woman	White	None	Yes
13	3 years	Social rent, single household	Barnet	Mid 60s	Man	White	None	Yes
14	3 years	Social rent, single household	Barnet	Mid 60s	Woman	White	None	Yes
15	6 years	Staying with friends	Greenwich	Mid 40s	Woman	Black	Unknown	No
16	2 years	Private rent, not sharing	Lambeth	Mid 30s	Woman	White	Cleaner and store clerk	No
17	3 years	Private rent, not sharing	Waltham Forest	Mid 30s	Man	Asian	Food service	No
18	6 years	Private rent, sharing with friends	Islington	Early 50s	Man	Black	None	Yes
19	2 years	Staying with family who social rent	Southwark	Late 30s	Woman	Black	Child care and cleaner	No
20	5 years	Private rent, sharing with strangers	Camden	Mid 50s	Man	White	Self-employed	No
21	<1 year	Private rent, not sharing	Southwark	Mid 30s	Woman	Black	Education	No
22	3 years	Private rent, sharing with strangers	Barnet	Mid 40s	Man	White	Unknown	No
23	2 years	Social rent, not sharing	Southwark	Late 50s	Woman	White	Clerical	Yes
24	2 years	Temporary accommodation	Camden	Mid 30s	Man	Asian	Unknown	No
#	Time on	Tenure	Borough	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Occupation	Disabled?

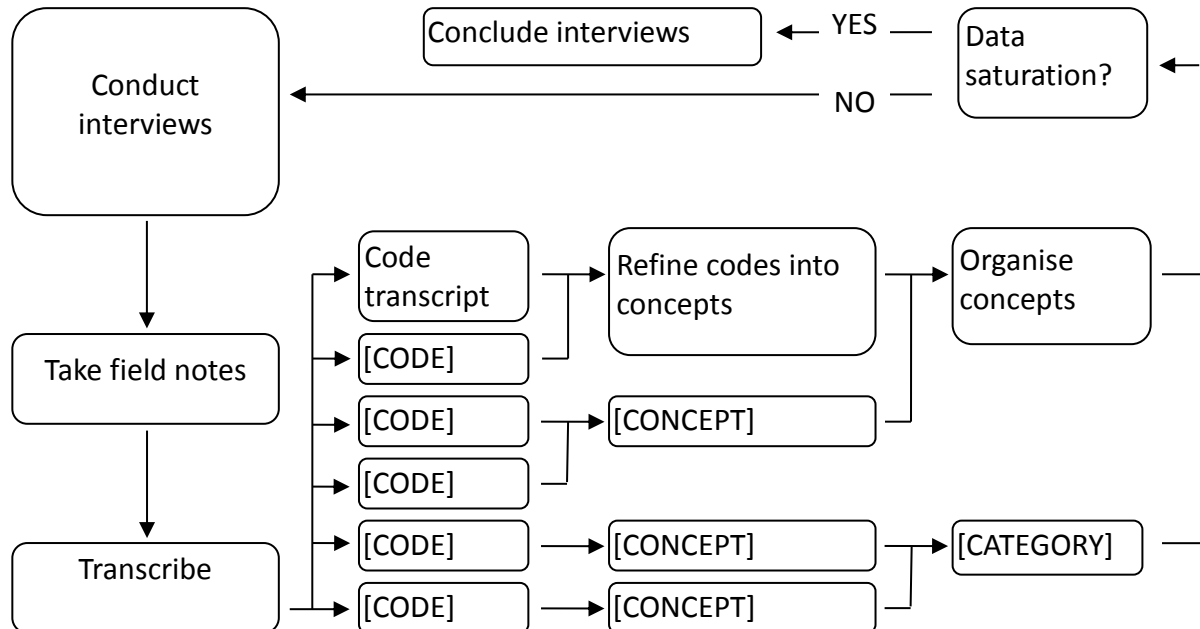
	Waiting List							
25	2-3 years	Private rent, sharing with strangers	Waltham Forest	Mid 30s	Man	White	Cleaner	No
26	<1 year	Staying with family that social rent	Hackney	Mid 30s	Woman	White	Store clerk	No
27	<1 year	Private rent, sharing with friends	Tower Hamlets	Mid 30s	Man	Asian	Unknown	No
28	5 years	Staying with friends that rent	Hackney	Late 30s	Woman	Black	Food service	No
29	6 years	Private rent, sharing with strangers	Southwark	Early 60s	Man	White	None	Yes
30	2 years	Staying with family, who own	Wandsworth	Mid 20s	Woman	White	Student	No
31	2 years	Staying with family, who own	Wandsworth	Mid 20s	Man	Asian	Clerical	No
32	5 years	Private rent, sharing with strangers	Haringey	Late 50s	Man	White	Clerical	Yes
33	<1 year	Staying with family, who rent socially	Tower Hamlets	Late 20s	Woman	White	Unknown	No
34	<1 year	Staying with family, who rent socially	Tower Hamlets	Late 20s	Man	Black	Store clerk	No
35	2 years	Renting socially, not sharing	Hackney	Late 50s	Woman	White	None	Yes
36	5 years	Private rent, not sharing	Hammersmith	Mid 30s	Man	White	Store clerk and security	No
37	5 years	Staying with family, who private rent	Hammersmith	Late 20s	Man	White	Unknown	No
38	3 years	Private rent, not sharing	Hackney	Late 20s	Woman	Asian	None	No
39	6 year	Private rent, not sharing	Greenwich	Early 40s	Man	White	Construction	Yes
40	<1 years	Staying with family, who private rent	Haringey	Late 20s	Woman	White	Food service	Yes
41	2 years	Staying with family, who private rent	Southwark	Late 20s	Woman	Black	Food service	Yes
42	4 years	Private rent, not sharing	Hammersmith	Late 60s	Man	White	None	Yes
43	5 years	Staying with family, who own	Islington	Mid 20s	Man	Black	Cleaner	Yes
44	<1 year	Private rent, not sharing	Islington	Mid 20s	Woman	White	Manufacturing	No
45	3 years	Private rent, not sharing	Tower Hamlets	Early 40s	Man	White	Unknown	No
46	5 years	Private rent, not sharing	Haringey	Early 40s	Woman	Asian	Clerical and cleaner	No
47	2 years	Private rent, sharing with strangers	Tower Hamlets	Mid 30s	Man	Black	Unknown	No
48	<1 year	Staying with family, who social rent	Tower Hamlets	Early 30s	Man	White	Cleaner	No
49	6 years	Private rent, sharing with strangers	Islington	Early 30s	Woman	White	Student and store clerk	Yes
50	5 years	Social rent, not sharing	Greenwich	Late 20s	Man	White	Store clerk	Yes

Data Analysis

Once qualitative data saturation had taken place, as evidenced by no significant new themes arising from new interviews, data collection was halted and more significant analysis begun. This process is diagrammed in Figure 2, below.

The first step in data analysis was the transcription of interviews. This was done without the assistance of automated transcription software for two reasons: first, to ensure the correct transcription of interviews, and second, to allow the researcher a second listen to the entire content of each interview with the opportunity to pause the conversation. Field notes were also supplemented at the time of transcription.

Figure 2: Flowchart of Data Analysis



The second step of data analysis was the categorisation of participant experiences into many *codes*. During the note taking exercises carried out during interviewing and transcription, many codes emerged, taken as rough notes. Codes

represent the lowest level of qualitative categorisation that data analysis can produce, and most served only as a placeholder until they could be more critically analysed and likely integrated during later stages of analysis. Many codes were developed during the interviewing and transcription process. It would be correct to say, therefore, that the interpretation of data began while data was still being collected.

The third step of data analysis was the organisation of codes first into *concepts*, then into *categories* of experience. While concepts were an intermediary step useful mostly for the organisation of the researcher's thoughts into similar groups, categories sought to organise many diverse and individual experiences under broad themes. Concepts began to emerge as interviews were carried out, but only through many repeated interviews expressing the same relationship between certain concepts could themes begin to form. These themes each compose multiple concepts, which themselves arise from individual codes present in interviews. In this way, this research escalated individual experience from the code, to commonly discussed experiences organised by concept, to truly broad topics running through most narratives as expressed in categories.

Developing the themes of these findings took some time. Interviews were coded, with codes being iterated upon many times and arising from the interviews themselves, rather than the academic literatures consulted in preparation for this research. To aid the process, I used three levels of iterative categorisations. "Codes" were the lowest level of common experience identified, often being identified within a single individual's interview as an important component of their experience that they would return to speak of frequently. The expression of codes

were often as unique as the individuals discussing them; nonetheless, many codes reappeared in multiple interviews, manifesting in different ways. These were elevated to the “concept” level, at which point a name was developed for each that attempted to encapsulate, in a broad way, the codes which appeared to be connected in some way; sometimes, this name would be borrowed from a particularly significant code that was being incorporated into that concept. From this point, it was observed that some concepts affected participants in similar ways; these were grouped together as “categories” and then titled. Ultimately, four particularly impactful categories were identified, each of which is the central theme of one of the following chapters discussing the empirical findings of this research.

To explicitly define each level of iterative coding, see below:

- *Code*: A frequently repeated topic, often within one participant’s interview, but that might span between the narratives of multiple participants. Some example codes were “children,” “parents,” and “support.”
- *Concept*: A grouping of similar codes. Though each code may or may not be unique, the constituent codes seem related enough that they can be grouped together to aid in analysis. For example, the “parents” and “children” codes were grouped into the “family” concept.
- *Category*: A group of categories that seem related in how the affected participants, and which have been grouped together under a broader name.

These were present in many interviews but were often expressed in very different ways. These formed the basis of the findings of this research, arising from iterative coding of interviews and not the theoretical literature described above, and will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

The methodology of analysis described above was carried out to ensure that the themes selected for discussion *did not* arise from the literatures identified in the previous chapter, but rather from the participant narratives themselves through iterative coding. Although the academic literatures identified in Chapter 2, as well as the interviewer's anecdotal experience working in social housing informed the development of the interview questions, and therefore likely had an indirect effect on the answers given by participants, the goal of this research has been to identify themes of experience as related by participants during their interviews. Therefore, data analysis was approached from an organic perspective, without referring to the literatures consulted in the preparatory phase of this research. The "codes," "concepts," and "categories" described above, which were critical intermediaries to identifying the four themes that will be discussed in subsequent chapters, were not taken from the literatures described in the previous chapter; rather, these were developed from the interviews participants gave through iterative coding.

Chosen Themes

Ultimately, the most significant participant experiences were categorised into the following four themes. These themes do not include every experience related; only those that were frequently repeated and/or of enough impact, when compared to other experiences, to warrant inclusion. These four themes were:

- *The conditions under which participating applicants live.* This theme was relevant to the agenda within structural violence scholarship to give voice to participants' narratives. Living conditions are fundamental to the human experience.

- *The patterns of victimisation and self-victimisation amongst participating applicants.* This theme was also relevant to the question raised by structural violence inquiring about the harm done to social housing applicants by reductions in social rented housing and changes to social housing allocation.
- *The role housing organisations play in influencing the experience of applicants.* This theme was relevant to the question arising from public administration regarding the efficacy of public housing organisations in dealing with the populations they serve.
- *The experience of participants of different methods of social housing allocation.* This theme was relevant to the query arising from Science, Technology, and Society questioning the purpose of social housing and social housing allocations, and in examining elements of cultural lag between that stated purpose and actual operations of the waiting list.

Each of these themes, developed from a category that arises from participant experience, forms one of the following four chapters of this thesis. In each of these chapters, the associated theme will be explored in depth to answer, with participant experience, the research questions posed in the introductory chapters of this thesis.

The final step of data analysis was to reverse the entire process by searching amongst participant narratives for the most representative or most evocative cases demonstrating the themes listed above. This was done for two reasons. First,

reversing the themes and searching for effective examples acted as a check to ensure that the themes were truly representative of individual narratives. If the themes were indeed well-selected, then there should be many examples of them throughout the interviews that, despite being elementary parts of a unique narrative, clearly relate back to the theme. This check was accomplished in a relatively straightforward manner by the researcher; each of the themes above did indeed have many examples confirming their validity. The second reason to reverse these themes and to search amongst individual narratives for effective examples was to create an effective and evocative narrative in preparation for writing the results chapters which follow below. Dozens of interviews could have been selected for writing up in the chapters following this one, yet amongst these, some were of course more powerful, more representative, or more relevant to the research questions being asked. With these guidelines in mind, the researcher therefore attempted to find the cases most useful for this research.

Conclusion of Methodology

This research has sought to acquire participant experience as data that is useful in the analysis of function and dysfunction of social rented housing and social rented housing allocation in the United Kingdom. In keeping with the traditions of structural violence, previous chapters have focused on the geographical and historical contexts of social rented housing so that individual narratives can be more effectively tied to large-scale forces. The purpose of this chapter has been to describe the methodology and methods by which these narratives have been captured. With this task done, this thesis will now turn to the results obtained,

communicating the narratives of participants as gathered, analysed and categorised by the researcher.

Chapter 3:

Living Conditions

Applying a structural violence framework to social housing allocations has led to the research question “Have reductions in the supply of social rented housing and changes to social rented housing allocation harmed those seeking social rented housing, and if so how?” The aim of this chapter is to answer the first half of this question by communicating the conditions under which some failed, non-emergency applicants to social rented housing live partially because of insufficient access to social rented housing resources. Reductions in funding for social rented housing since 1980 appear to have had deleterious effects on participants of this research. In response to their failed applications for social rented housing, participants have pursued a variety of coping housing strategies that appear undesirable. As this research has uncovered, they have lived in small and overcrowded homes, rented low quality housing, overworked themselves to pay high rents, and/or led unfulfilling family lives as a result of the above. Because this research has attempted to closely follow a structural violence method in its approach, the communication of these living conditions is a priority of this work not only to give voice to the struggles of participants, but also to understand why participants applied for social rented housing in the first place and to understand the broader historical reasons for why this housing is no longer available. Many of these broader forces are outside of participants’ control or perception, therefore this thesis seeks to place their individual narratives into historical and geographical context to gain a better understanding of the causes behind their failed

applications. The systemic deprivation of what is needed for a good life is central to Farmer's (1996) definition of structural violence, therefore this chapter will seek to establish this systemic harm to show that what is presented here is in fact an example of structural violence.

The discussion on participant living conditions presented in this chapter is divided into three sections, each discussing one of the most common themes participants discussed when asked about their living conditions. These three themes are overcrowding, family life, and poor housing quality. Each of these themes is intimately linked to one another, and all speak to one, broad finding: that housing was one of the central pillars of participant experience. Without decent and affordable homes, I will argue, participants were unable to hold decent jobs, maintain familial bonds, or live in a way that they would call acceptable. Housing institutions - whether social or private, for sale or rent - are central to influencing how a household lives. The housing situation of each participant formed a core aspect of the narrative about their lives. For these people, the struggle to acquire what they called a "good home" at an "affordable price" in a "short time" had severely negative effects on their quality of life. If they chose to rent privately, it was at great cost and required them to work significantly more hours. If they rented a less expensive dwelling, it often had serious habitability problems. If they instead lived with ageing parents, they were ashamed of not being able to make it on their own or offer an independent home to their children. If they shared a flat with other households, they felt that the lack of personal space was constricting. In short, every participant interviewed had to make significant housing compromises. This chapter seeks to draw attention to these compromises to give voice to participants'

experiences, to identify the reasons why participants applied for social housing, and to highlight the harm that has been done by reducing investments in rented social lettings.

Structural violence, with its emphasis on the historical and geographical contextualisation of individual, participant narrative, has been useful for revealing one thing above all others: the lack of awareness of this context on the part of individual applicants to social housing. On an individual level, many participants believed at the outset of their application process that to gain access to social housing, it was enough simply to be overcrowded or not living well. As their applications would continue to fail they would find that this was not the case, though they were unable to say exactly why this was. Structural violence is an ideal tool for filling this gap.

Overcrowding

The title for this thesis, “Only Overcrowded,” has been taken from the most common experience shared by participants: overcrowded living conditions and the insufficiency of that condition in obtaining social rented housing. Almost every person interviewed for this research lived in what they judged to be overcrowded conditions and had failed to access social housing, despite the legal requirement for housing organisations to offer overcrowded households preference in the allocation process. Participants felt that because they perceived themselves to be overcrowded, they were owed a home that they weren’t being given. Indeed many participants were likely given preference, but this preference was insufficient to guarantee them access to social housing. This conflict arises in part from

differences between popular perceptions of overcrowding, local authority operationalisation of overcrowding measures, and the legal definition of statutory overcrowding as defined by the Housing Act of 1985. Prior to exploring participant narrative around overcrowding, therefore, a brief detour into the legal and operational definitions of overcrowding is necessary.

Standards for Overcrowding

Statutory overcrowding is the legal requirement that people not live in overcrowded residences. It is calculated in two ways: the room standard and the space standard. If either is contravened, then the house is deemed statutorily overcrowded and local authorities must immediately house occupants as if they were homeless. The room standard requires that a home have enough rooms to allow men and women to sleep in separate rooms, therefore any home with at least two rooms cannot be found to be overcrowded by the room standard as there is no limit to the number of people of the same sex that can share a single room. The space standard measures overcrowding using two alternative methods, one based on the number of rooms in a house and the other on the size of those rooms, per tables 3 and 4 below. Both room and space standard methods are calculated for any house; the stricter number is then used as the space standard for that house. The statutory definition of overcrowding counts both living rooms and kitchens as rooms if there is enough space to accommodate a bed. By consulting the tables below, we can indeed see that statutory overcrowding is a very difficult law to break. A three-bedroom home with a kitchen and living room, for example, could likely hold up to ten people before being considered overcrowded.

Table 3: Space Standard A (Wilson and Fears 2016)

Number of Rooms*	People Allowed
1	2
2	3
3	5
4	7.5
5	10
+1	+2 people

* Including living rooms and kitchens if they can accommodate a bed

Table 4: Space Standard B (Wilson and Fears 2016)

Number of Rooms*	People Allowed
Less than 50 ft ²	0
50-70 ft ²	.5
70-90 ft ²	1
90-110 ft ²	1.5
More than 110 ft ²	2

* Including living rooms and kitchens if they can accommodate a bed

Breach of these statutory limits on overcrowding is a criminal offence, but rare. These laws were written as a minimum legislation to protect against the worst overcrowding in the private rented sector before the Second World War, and have not been updated since 1935. By the government's own admission (Wilson and Fears 2016), neither the room standard nor the space standard are generous. Because of the illegality of statutory overcrowding, data on this is difficult to obtain. The most recent estimate is from 2003 (according to Wilson and Fears 2016), that only 20,000, or less than 2% of households are statutorily overcrowded.

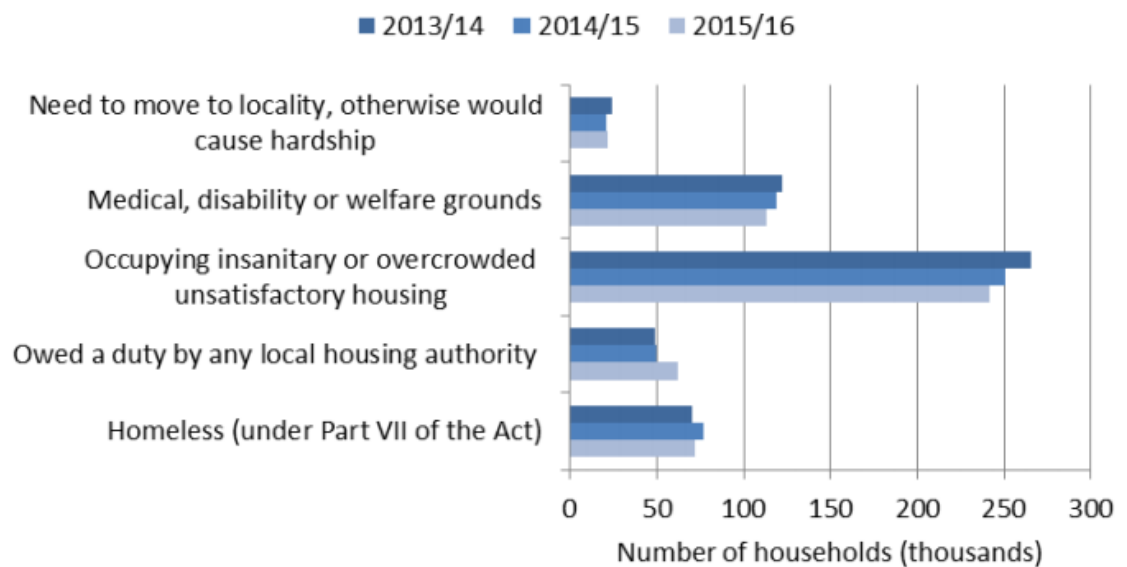
There is another state-defined measure of overcrowding known as the “bedroom standard.” In 2012 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) required local authorities to begin applying the bedroom standard when measuring need in social rented housing allocation. The bedroom standard is significantly more generous than statutory definitions of overcrowding. It requires a separate bedroom for each of the below:

- A married or cohabitating couple,
- An adult aged 21 years or more,
- A pair of adolescents aged 10-20 years of the same sex, and
- A pair of children aged under 10 regardless of sex

This measure has taken on a more central role in governance and social housing allocation in recent years. According to the 2011 (ONS) census, 4.5% of all households and 8.6% of all privately rented households were defined as overcrowded per this bedroom standard. The overcrowded rate becomes significantly higher when one examines London, where all five of the most overcrowded local authorities can be found (Newham 25.2% of all households overcrowded, Brent 17.7%, Tower Hamlets 16.4%, Haringey 15.9% and Waltham Forest 15.4%). It is clear from these survey numbers that London has an overcrowding problem. Critically, however, local authorities are not required to house people who are overcrowded according to the bedroom standard; they must only give them preference. How they award this preference, and how much preference to award, is left at the discretion of local authorities. As it stands, most local authorities provide a rather small amount of preference to being overcrowded. See graph 3, which shows that overcrowding and poor living

conditions, together, are the most common categories of reasonable preference cited in housing applications.

Chart 7: Households on LA Waiting Lists with Preference Categories (DCLG 2017a)



It is also important to note that these definitions of overcrowding stand in isolation from the perspective on overcrowding of individual applicants to social rented housing, who view overcrowding from their own rather than an institutional perspective. To the individual applicant, overcrowding is a highly subjective term. The remainder of this section will attempt to demonstrate how participants have experienced and defined overcrowding, and how this compares to statutory and bedroom standard definitions of the same. This section will then conclude with a historical discussion of overcrowding in UK housing, in accordance with the principles of structural violence scholarship, to connect the individual narratives described below to the historical context which participants lack.

Overcrowding in Participant Narratives

Most participants of this research fell into the bedroom standard definition of overcrowded, but not the statutory definition which would have required the local authority to house them immediately. Some lived with their extended family in homes intended for single family occupancy, sometimes with a parent, other times with a sibling or cousin. Other households rented a private home that was simply too small for their family. Many households flat-shared by renting one or more rooms in a private accommodation occupied by multiple families. The effects of overcrowding went beyond the lack of space that is evident; the lack of privacy and freedom to do as one pleases without being observed, participants indicated, had detrimental effects on them. Participants rarely had any understanding of either the statutory or bedroom standard definitions of overcrowding. Rather than that, they had a general awareness that overcrowding was considered in the housing allocation process, and they felt overcrowded. Most participants, having thus far failed in their applications to social housing, therefore concluded that it was not enough to be “only overcrowded,” though they failed to grasp why. This forms a central narrative of this thesis: the confused failure of multiple applicants to access a resource to which they believed they should have access.

Broadly speaking, there were two categories of respondents with respect to overcrowding: those living without children, and those living with children.

Narratives between these groups deviated somewhat. Adults without children complained of the stresses of sharing their domicile with other adults and families, for example, sharing toilets, kitchens, and other common spaces. Adults with children complained of the guilt they felt in not being able to provide sufficient

space for their children. Both groups complained of the stress caused by lack of private space and time, the problems caused by living in such proximity to others, for example noise, and other social and psychological factors. First, this thesis will address the overcrowding of adults without children, before turning to adults with children.

Below is the first instance in this thesis of transcribed participant narrative, which will henceforth usually appear in *indented italic text*. Most instances of participant narrative will be preceded by a brief introduction describing the relevance of the chosen narrative to the topic being discussed, as well as some background information on the participant's housing situation and/or history. This information has been excluded if it would have made the participant identifiable. Interviews went very well, usually lasting at least an hour as participants went into great depth about their housing histories, their current applications to social rented housing, and many subjects of a very emotional nature. As mentioned before, participants appeared aware at the outset of the interview that their participation in this research had no effect on their application to social rented housing, and it appeared that all participants maintained that understanding throughout. A table containing participant information is available on page 145.

Jeremy is a man in his late twenties who lives in a three-bedroom house in Peckham which he shares with four other adult, working men. Jeremy's case is representative of the conditions endured by many single or divorced adults interviewed for this research. Jeremy and each of his flatmates are employed in full-time, low wage jobs which provide insufficient income for them to rent a more spacious residence on their own. They therefore share a relatively small flat in a

converted warehouse. Jeremy works at a local chain grocery store, stocking the shelves at night and sleeping during the day. He shares a room with one of his housemates; the other three each get a room to themselves, one of them having converted the living room to another bedroom, and each pays a higher rent than Jeremy and his roommate. By the statutory definition of overcrowding, the flat can accommodate up to 7.5 people before being considered overcrowded. By the bedroom standard definition of overcrowding, however, this household would require a four-bedroom home and is therefore overcrowded. Regardless of these state definitions, however, it is clear that Jeremy feels overcrowded, though he at first tries to brush off the negative consequences of his living conditions. In the passage below Jeremy begins by dismissing the difficulty of his position, but then expands into the challenges he faces, many of them arising from having to share a room and a house with other adults.

Nah, it's not so bad. We've worked it out, see, so it's okay.

Not ideal by any stretch, but at least okay. I work a night job, stocking the shelves at a 24-hour grocery store. My working day doesn't start until about 11 PM, so I leave the house a little after 10 and don't get back until 8 in the morning. By then, my roommate has usually already left for his job; he works at the front desk of some office in the city, and doesn't finish until 6. Most of the others are gone during those hours, too. So, I have the place to myself from 8 to, usually about 5 or 6. That's when I have my time, and that's usually fine.

But after they get home, well, you know I usually try to go to bed at 1 PM, and when they get home I have to sleep through that. And my friend here, well it's his room, so I can't fault him for using it, even though I need to catch some sleep before my shift. I'm a light sleeper, so I usually miss out on a few winks, with him doing his thing. After I get up and start getting about, it's not as much of a problem, except that I have to move around him. Which is annoying – as you can see there isn't much space in here with both of our belongings packed into one room, but it is what it is. For what I'm paying, I guess it's worth it.

It has occurred to me that I could switch my sleeping schedule to sleep after I get home from work; then I'd have eight hours of uninterrupted sleep, which is really what I need. But the problem with doing that is that I'd be giving up my alone time. Those, what... five hours I get to myself, they keep me sane.

It isn't just my roommate that gets on my nerves, it's the other guys as well. Like, there's five of us living in here. In a three-bedroom place, or what was meant to be. Okay? Five guys, one shower. Two toilets. We don't have enough cupboards in the kitchen to hold our crap, and the sink is always full of dishes. It's like... I'm not an ant, you know? I can't like, live ducking and weaving everyone all the time. Your house is supposed to be your own little space where you can go to unwind and do as you please without anyone, like, seeing. And I just don't have that. And on top

of that, I don't really know these guys. We're all renting together, but we weren't friends beforehand – one of us found this place through Gumtree, and posted an ad there to find other roommates... So we're a lot of randoms. So we don't, like, cut each other the same slack you might cut a friend you were living with; or you might not be as considerate. It's a tense situation.

So yeah, I guess the trade-off I'm making is – sleep a little more poorly, but, you know, have my own space for a little part of the day. Which means all the more, when you're living with this many people. It's an opportunity the other guys don't have. I'm lucky I work nights, I get away from them to be fair.

Jeremy's compromise is a tough one: he must choose between uninterrupted sleep and his treasured alone time. After his interview continues for a short while, he offers to give a quick tour of the house, and it is enough to show how cramped it is. Like in the flats of many participants interviewed for this research, the kitchen is the only shared common space, and in this flat it is small and cramped, located in the centre of the house without any windows and outfitted with ageing appliances. Further limiting the space is a mountain of cookware, dishware, and personal appliances. Because each man living in the house is his own self-contained household, many duplicate possessions crowd not only the kitchen, but the cupboards, closets, and halls throughout the home. Three separate ironing boards lean next to the hall closet, and a forest of clothes drying racks crowd around the combination washer/dryer set next to the sink. A hodgepodge assortment of plates, mugs, pots, and pans cover every surface of the

kitchen, in various stages of use or cleaning depending on how they were left by their owners. The inefficiency of five households living in one house, without sharing key resources, is clearly choking what little space these men might otherwise have. When queried about this, Jeremy only lifts his eyebrow as he stands in the kitchen. He dismisses the idea of sharing with the wave of a hand because of the “transient” nature of the house’s members. He goes on to explain:

No, no. People come and go way too often for that. I forget who’s actually on the lease, to be honest with you – we keep subletting as people come and go, as they do. When someone goes, they wouldn’t want to have to buy something all over again because they threw their old one out, so everyone holds onto their stuff. Even though it does take up a lot of space. We’re practically tripping over it, as you can plainly see. But, everyone is just a little too transient to let it all go. Who knows when you’ll need to move for work, or if a better situation opens up somewhere? We have people coming and going every few months. It’s okay.

Jeremy keeps saying “it’s okay,” seeming to protect himself from the despair his situation might otherwise invoke in him. Yet between attempts to brush off his struggles, he tells a story of extreme compromise and necessary sacrifices in the face of housing scarcity. Because he cannot afford to rent a room of his own, he has chosen to share a room with someone else in a flat that is already too crowded. Although the two of them have managed to take advantage of mutually beneficial working patterns to secure time to use their shared space without the other’s presence, both roommates acknowledge that the living situation is causing them

stress. He has had to choose between getting the sleep he needs and the space he needs. He must also accommodate the others' patterns of living. Some of his flatmates are not as clean as Jeremy, and so communal spaces are never up to his standard unless he invests his own time in cleaning up after others. The fact that no one in the household is willing to share ownership of communal items means that everyone must own duplicate items, further reducing the space available to all of them. Finally, just living in such proximity with so many people has clearly had a dehumanising effect on Jeremy; he repeatedly refers to himself as an ant in an ants' nest, always ducking and weaving around his flatmates.

Although Jeremy was the only participant interviewed who shared a room with another adult with whom he was not coupled, the conditions that he describes were very common amongst almost all narratives from working adults living without children. Many such participants had made the choice to flat share. These flats were almost always overcrowded as per the bedroom standard because almost every living room had been converted into an extra bedroom used to house a single adult. Participants indicated that the loss of the living room was significant because there was no space within such flats dedicated to group socialisation, which reduced the ability of flatmates to enjoy one another's company; as such, tensions were reportedly higher. Though kitchens were often used as makeshift social spaces, these were often indicated to be not spacious enough given the high occupancy rate of flat-sharing participants, particularly given the function of the kitchen as a cooking and perhaps eating space, rather than a social space. Broadly speaking, most flat-shares lacked dedicated social space which participants

complained added to their stress and reduced their ability to socialise to reduce stress from their outside lives.

The cohabitation of multiple households also gave rise to the repeated theme of duplicate possessions, therefore the already cramped common space of the kitchen was made further overcrowded by many sets of dishes, cookware and appliances which in a combined household would be shared. Finally the lack of intimacy between flatmates, who rather than pre-existing acquaintances were often complete strangers subletting from one primary tenant through an anonymous online service such as Gumtree, led to a lack of trust and camaraderie between housemates. These factors contributed to an increase in stress and decrease in quality of life as expressed by participants. Jeremy concluded this in summary, at the end of his interview. The internal conflict Jeremy struggles with is clear in the difficulty he has in clearly communicating the challenges, for example below:

It's hard to explain it all, it's complicated. It all kind of just, makes me kind of unhappy, sort of irritated, living like this. I just don't have space to think or breathe. I feel like an ant. Eventually I need to find my own space. I can't rent my own place obviously, but, if I can get a better job, maybe... but it's okay for now.

The social and psychological challenges posed by overcrowding were not limited to single-person households, however. Participants with children expressed many of the same concerns Jeremy and other childless participants expressed, in addition to expressing significant guilt over not being able to provide the kind of

environment they wanted to provide to the children for whom they were responsible.

Henrietta provides a particularly potent narrative, relating the overcrowding of her family, including herself and two children, and how they have not been successful in pursuing social rented housing, despite believing herself to be a prime candidate. She lives on the tenth story of an ALMO (arms-length management organisation) flat in Wandsworth, a particularly worn one. The door buzzer does not function properly; the grey concrete interior is dingy, chipped, and poorly lit by fluorescent lighting only half of which is itself functioning; the lift smells strongly of urine, it's foggy, mirrored surface carved with graffiti. The atmosphere is a grim one, yet it ends at her front door which is painted a bright shade of blue. Inside, her home is impeccably neat and clean, with furnishings that – though old – have been maintained well. An overstuffed couch sits against one wall, with a worn, oak coffee table sitting in front of it, opposite a bulky television that appears to be at least fifteen years old. Framed oil paintings adorn the painted walls, and geometric rugs cover the sealed, hardwood floors. Despite the cleanliness, it is also clear that the home is overcrowded. Shelves line every wall, and each is brimming with books, toys, or other possessions. There are three bedrooms in the flat. Henrietta lives with her cousin in one, also a single mother; her cousin's children have the second bedroom; and her own children have the third. The children's rooms each host a pair of bunkbeds and a single desk, and a small television on a rolling table. It is clear that Henrietta and the cousin that she lives with have tried to keep their home as orderly as possible, one strategy that was common amongst single parents forced to live in overcrowded accommodations. Henrietta speaks here about how

difficult it is to keep the home orderly with so many children in the home, before moving on to the challenges they face in keeping a positive state of mind:

It can be very difficult, you know. There are four children in this house, between the ages of eight and fourteen, and it is a real problem to deal with their different needs for space and interaction. It's really not a very big place, and it's not like they can go out into the front yard and play. And it's not a nice neighbourhood, so they can't really go to the park on their own, or something, like they could if we lived somewhere a little further out, perhaps.

So, despite us taking them to the park, and other places, they tend to spend a lot of time in the house – and it's just too small to be able to be workable, you know? I mean, we make it work, as you can see I – we, rather – keep it very clean and running like a machine. We have to, otherwise we would go insane. But it's a lot of work, much more than it would be if we had our own place, which I desperately hope for.

We are literally living on top of each other in here. It is a shame, you know, for the children to have to live like this. None of them really have their own space, it's just not a very big place. Especially for the 14-year old, he lives with his little brother, who is 11, sleeping underneath him and... he's just not comfortable with it. He wants his own space, and lately he's realised that maybe he should have it, despite the circumstances. So he's bitter. Maybe it's just his age, but he's become like, frustrated? Angry at the

situation, like, couldn't I have done better? Normally I wouldn't have given it much consideration, he's a teenager you know. But, what he's saying has some validity, you know? So it hurts all the more. And then my hurt, and his anger, it sort of invades the rest of the house, you know? All it takes is for one person to be in a bad mood in here, and it ruins all of our days.

Henrietta then goes on to talk about her thankfulness towards her cousin, for taking her and her family in. Despite their clearly overcrowded condition, Henrietta has been classified as purposefully homeless because she surrendered a council house over five years ago, to move outside the United Kingdom in pursuit of a job opportunity. She returned nearly two years ago, and upon applying for another social tenancy, was told that she would be at the bottom of the list because she surrendered one several years before. Her best option at that point, she said, was to move in with her cousin, who was renting a flat from an ALMO in Wandsworth. She expresses her gratitude to her family below, acknowledging the difficulty this has caused her host household as there are six people in the home:

I'm so appreciative of her taking us in, especially because what it has meant for her and her kids. My boys and me, we are here because of the decisions I made. I didn't know when I left that it meant I couldn't come back to the same kind of house I had then, but this is still something I've done, so maybe in some way, I deserve what I'm getting. But they've taken on this burden, my burden, willingly, and it's been a long time now.

I mean, we are literally two families, living in a space that was meant for one family. Two children to each, rather small bedroom; and the two adults, sharing a room too. They didn't have to do this, but I really don't know what I would do if it wasn't for them. The council has told me they aren't obliged to house me, so, I would just be up the creek, as they say.

Henrietta's situation, like Jeremy's, was all too common. Participants often moved in with extended family to avoid the cost of renting a place on their own, and this often led to overcrowding for both their own family and the family hosting them. Like Jeremy's combined household, Henrietta and her cousin are not statutorily overcrowded: again, a three-bedroom home with a living room can host up to 7.5 people before being considered overcrowded. The five of them are well below this limit. The bedroom standard does find them overcrowded, however, because there are insufficient bedrooms for Henrietta and her cousin – a non-coupled pair of adults – to each have their own without also sharing with someone else in the household. Though this requires the council to give them some measure of priority over other applicants, the amount of preference given is at the discretion of the council and Wandsworth has chosen to deprioritise Henrietta because of her purposefully homeless status. Even without this, it is unlikely that being overcrowded would be sufficient in ensuring her allocation of a social vacancy because there are many other conditions that are prioritised above overcrowding. It is likely that in previous decades, a social tenancy would have been forthcoming for Henrietta and her children given the level at which they are overcrowded. In this new era of social rented housing scarcity, however, there are other applicants in

greater need than her as defined by the measuring tools of local authorities and housing associations.

Overcrowding was a common theme running throughout almost every interview taking place as part of this research, yet in each of these cases overcrowding was not enough to earn the interviewed participants a socially rented home. Many participants had been waiting for many years, too, living in overcrowded conditions while waiting to be allocated a home. Most participants knew that overcrowding did play a role in housing allocation, but almost none knew exactly how overcrowding was measured.

Chris, a participant from Hammersmith, expressed this more succinctly than most others. A single father with two young sons, he rents two bedrooms in a four-bedroom home which is shared with another family. His two boys share a bedroom, and he has a bedroom to himself. He feels that this is not enough space, but is not sure how his need is being measured.

I really don't know how they count us. I know that on my application, they wanted to know how many of us there were, and how many rooms – and bedrooms – we had. I had to fill out a form. But I'm not sure how that worked, beyond knowing that it had something, somehow, to do with the number of points we got. All I know is, we're living like sardines in here! But it's not enough to be only overcrowded, I guess. Because if it was, well, we'd have been housed by now! Not enough... not enough points for it, I guess.

Chris' confusion about the assessment of overcrowded households was rather common. Although central government requires local authorities to give

preferential treatment to overcrowded families, it does not specify how much preference to afford them compared to other preferred groups. As it turns out, most housing allocation policies do not offer as much preference to overcrowded families as they do to, for example, homeless households who are statutorily obligated to be housed immediately, or medically disabled households, who are often simply categorised as higher priority. In many cases, there are simply not enough rented social homes to go around. Overcrowding is not seen as being as bad as other conditions, and so is rarely worth enough points under the various allocation systems to warrant an overcrowded household having easy access to a social letting without additional qualifying circumstances.

This is the unfortunate paradox that inspires the title of this research. Participants correctly believed that they had housing preference because they were basically all overcrowded; yet they were all in various stages of realising that they were “only overcrowded” and therefore unlikely to access social housing despite this preference. One participant who was applying for a housing association home in Greenwich directly asked the question, “I know we’re overcrowded; isn’t that enough?” It would appear that it no longer is. To understand why this is the case, it is necessary to examine the broader historical context within which overcrowding, and its varying definitions, sits. At the smallest scale of examination, individuals to this research reported themselves as overcrowded – yet their self-definition as such often does not agree with the statutory or bedroom-based definitions of overcrowding, hence the cultural lag.

Historically, the statutory limitation on overcrowding in British homes was a response to the conditions that arose during the industrialisation of British cities.

Initially, overcrowding was viewed as a public health concern and a nuisance. The first legislation to address overcrowding in British homes was the Public Health Act of 1891, which empowered and required local authorities to monitor the occupancy of private dwellings as a matter of proper sanitation. The measurement of overcrowding was at this time set at two persons per room, counting children under three years as nil and children from three to ten years as one half a person. This was further enshrined in the Housing the Working Class Act of 1894, which funded council efforts to abate overcrowding, and further reinforced in the Housing Act of 1900, empowering local authorities to purchase land for social housing development, to alleviate overcrowding and other sanitary concerns arising from similar “nuisances.” From reading these initial legislative efforts to reduce overcrowding, it is clear that the governance of housing occupancy in the UK was not initially a humanitarian effort, unlike the charitable housing associations of the time, but viewed as a matter of public interest related to health and sanitation.

This original purpose of overcrowding governance is significant when examining the narratives of participants of this research, who largely argue for their right to housing not in terms of public health or benefit, but in terms of their humanitarian right to good housing. Where did they get this idea from? To find out, we must examine subsequent developments in British housing that transformed overcrowding abatement from a matter of public health to public entitlement. After the First World War, the Homes Fit for Heroes initiative would provide housing for returning veterans, a provision that would later be expanded to include other vital workers. As discussed in Chapter 1, the provision of housing by the state, as a humanitarian effort, begins in the 1940s with the report by William Beveridge titled

“Social Insurance and Allied Services” (Beveridge 1942). In this report, Beveridge defines the five “fundamental evils” of want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness; and argues that it should fall on society as a whole to alleviate these evils through collective investment carried out by the government. This report, acted upon by a post-war Labour government, saw the creation of the NHS and other allied services, amongst which was a steep increase in the provision of social housing to poor and middle-class British citizens. Language had shifted considerably, away from a public health perspective on overcrowding and towards a humanitarian one. This ethic would continue to influence social housing in the United Kingdom throughout the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, as entitlement for social housing and spending to match would continue to increase. In the years between 1945 and 1980, it would appear based on the interviews undertaken for this research that a cultural awareness of social housing as entitlement, on humanitarian grounds, has been ingrained in participants’ expectations to be socially housed.

However, cultural perceptions often lag behind the operational realities of institutions, and it would appear that this is the case for those participating in this research. Since 1980, investment in social rented housing has dwindled considerably. As described in Chapter 2, every government since 1980 has enacted some policies to either de-fund or de-emphasise social rented housing. The Thatcher government implemented Right to Buy, reducing existing social rented housing stock while not contributing new money to replace it; the Labour government continued Conservative policies to encourage the deregulation of social rented housing from state-run, to housing association-run; the Coalition

government sought to implement more market mechanics in social rented housing through choice-based lettings; and the new Conservative government has drastically reduced social housing rents paid, further reducing the funds available to all social landlords for new construction. Each of these initiatives, and others, have eroded the availability of social rented housing.

One of the findings of this research is that participants were broadly unaware of this erosion of social rented housing resources until their applications had already been ongoing for several years. Participants had often grown up in social housing, unaware that this resource would not be available to them when they entered adulthood. They therefore came to their social rented housing applications with the expectation that they would be housed on humanitarian grounds because overcrowding is a “fundamental evil.” Many participants felt that they should not be allowed to live in such overcrowded conditions, simply because it “wasn’t right.” Given the history of social housing provision in the UK as a humanitarian entitlement and their own personal experiences with social rented housing as children or younger adults, it is logical for participants to have concluded that social rented housing continues to be available. Participant experiences with current social housing allocations, however, has taught them that social rented housing is certainly not available to them currently, largely because they are “only overcrowded.”

There are two elements to a structural violence approach to research. The first is the communication of participant narrative, the second is placing that narrative into historical and geographical context. In this section I have attempted to communicate the narratives of participants about overcrowding and how they

feel that being overcrowded is enough to justify their entry into social rented housing. Despite that feeling, they have not been allocated a home. I have then attempted to place the role of overcrowding into the context of British social housing history, connecting the narratives of individuals to a larger understanding. The perception of overcrowding as a humanitarian crisis that requires immediate government intervention is not one that is carried through in actual legislation except in the most extreme cases. Few participants realised at the outset of their application process that it is not enough to be overcrowded.

Family Life

Although overcrowding was the most common living condition described by participants in this research, the effects of housing on family life was a close second only because many participants interviewed did not have children. Amongst those participants with children, the effects of housing on family were a dominant narrative theme. One phrase kept repeating itself throughout interviews of those with children for whom they were responsible: “the importance of a good home in raising children.” Different participants would go on to define good housing differently, but nearly all applicants who had families viewed the search for social rented housing as central to their efforts to establish a fertile ground for the security and happiness of their family, particularly their children. Participants’ failure to acquire good housing through a social tenancy led to three primary responses: renting low-quality private accommodations at low cost, renting higher quality accommodations at high cost, or living with one’s extended family. Each of these responses was very much a compromise, and presented participants with a

set of family-oriented challenges which will be described below in the representational cases of Omar, Rebecca and Aaron.

A Caribbean man in his late thirties, Omar immigrated to the UK nearly twenty years ago, finding a job in the construction industry, getting married, and having two children before divorcing from his wife. He now lives in Tottenham, as close to his children's school as possible so that he can visit with them once school is out. He does this because his living conditions are too cramped to allow him to host them as frequently as he would like. Omar has taken the first route, to rent a low-quality accommodation at low cost, so that he can work fewer hours and spend more time with his children. The quality of his accommodation, however, has compromised his ability to have his two daughters visit at home, a fact which he regrets from the single bedroom he rents amongst five in the ageing flat. He discusses this in the passage below, lamenting that he cannot have his children over more often, as well as the conditions of the home when they do come over:

I wish I could have my daughters over more, I really do. They come over once a month, or so. And that just isn't enough, is it? I want to see them every day, I very much wish I could; but the fact is, this place is just much too small. This room is my only space, and that just isn't enough. Four other groups live in this flat, and we all have to share the kitchen and the toilets, so that's far from private, is it? Not really usable for that, no. So we go out, to the park and things. But it's not the same as having your own space.

And, it wouldn't be fair to the others living here, if I had my daughters over all the time. That doesn't concern me as much, to be honest, but it does enter my mind.

The real reason I can't have them over more is the size of this room. I just have the one single bed, and you know, when they come over, we all have to share it. And the older one, she's getting on... 11 now. Getting too old to share a bed with her father. It would be nice if we had, like, a couch, and a television, you know where we could all just go and watch a movie together. Our own space. It's really about having your own space. How can you have a family, if you don't have your own space? You can't.

Indeed, hosting family visits would likely be difficult and unpleasant given Omar's living conditions. As you enter his five-bedroom flat from its entrance on the ground floor, you are immediately overwhelmed by how crowded the home is. The small entryway is dominated by a staircase that leads immediately upwards, for the flat is a walk-up, but what space is available here is crowded with the five bicycles owned by the flat's occupants. The stairs up are uncarpeted, unsealed wood that creaks with every step. There are five bedrooms, each occupied either by a single man or a couple, and all of their various cooking possessions are crowded into the obsolete kitchen. There is an old, round wooden dining table in the centre of the room that offers the flat's only communal space, the sitting room having been converted into the fifth bedroom. The entire flat only has one full and one half bathroom, facilities which are shared between seven people. Each bedroom is rather small, and Omar's is no exception. A single bed rests against one wall, and a

long dresser sits opposite it, with a 32 inch TV on top of it. There is just enough room between the bed and dresser to walk, and only less than half a metre of space between the foot of the bed and the room's fourth wall. Omar pulls a folding chair from behind the door to host guests; it is a feat that he manages to fit both of his daughters in this room at the same time, let alone find sleeping arrangements for himself. Here he speaks about the emotional impact this has on him:

It breaks my heart. I have to watch them growing up, living at my ex-wife's place – which is big enough. I don't get to tuck them in at night, or be there when they wake up. I miss a lot. And now that they're getting on, well, it's going faster, you know? And it's harder and harder to fit everyone in here. I feel pressure to get my own place. But it's hard, and rents are only going up.

I spend what time I can with them, that's part of the compromise I make by living here, that I get to spend more time with them. The rent is less than at some of the other places I've been at, so I can afford to work less. So I get to spend some time with them after school, here and there, because I can choose not to work those hours. Which is nice. But it's a catch 22, you see? If I worked more, I could afford a better place; but if I work more, I wouldn't have the time to see them, because I'd be working or too tired from work. So, it's kind of a lose-lose situation. What do I do?

Omar gives a quick demonstration of the sleeping arrangements for everyone when his daughters come over. He pulls a sleeping roll from underneath his bed, a thin insulated foam mat that he unrolls on the narrow space between his

bed and dresser. He sleeps here, he says, while his two daughters take his bed which is itself only a single mattress. He says his oldest daughter is growing fast, though, and there just isn't enough space on the bed for the two girls to sleep comfortably. For now he seems happy to have the space to host them, but knows that he will need to rent a larger accommodation soon in order to continue having them over.

On the other side of London, Rebecca tells the other side of Omar's story; that of someone who has decided to rent a better home, but at significantly more cost and therefore more working hours. Rebecca is a single parent, divorced like Omar from her children's other parent. Unlike Omar, she has decided to work two full-time jobs to be able to rent her family's house, a picturesque, two-bedroom semi-detached home in Mitcham. It is set back a few blocks from the high street, at the end of a cul-de-sac, with similar family homes on either side. Unlike the urban bustle of Omar's second-story, Tottenham home, Rebecca's house is almost idyllic in setting. The house has a front and rear garden, both adorned with flower boxes; there is a swing out back; neighbourhood children ride bikes around the empty streets in the hours after school lets out. Inside, the two-bedroom home is spacious. She has her own bedroom, unlike so many of the applicants to social housing interviewed for this research, and her children share a single, rather spacious room. The house has a reception room, sizeable kitchen, and a separate dining room. It has been well maintained, with kitchen and bathroom fittings easily twenty years more recent than those in Omar's residence. In many ways, Rebecca's home is the stereotypical suburban home, spacious and comfortable. Yet the cost to rent such a space is significant, more than Rebecca can afford on a single income.

Here she speaks about how hard she works, how tired she is when she is done working, and how this negatively impacts her ability to spend time with her family.

I work two jobs, both full time. In the daytime, I work at a nearby school in the lunchroom, cooking and feeding the children. It's a tiring job, I'm on my feet all day, it gets very hot, and the work – cleaning, cooking, getting everything done on time – it is tiring. And the pay is not good enough, of course, but it's close to home, so I'm happy to have it.

After I am done there, usually around three or so, I am off to my other job as a cleaner in Angel. Yes, it's all the way across town; it usually takes me at least an hour to get there, and during rush hour and everything. But it pays a little bit better than my job at the school, so I'm lucky in that way, I guess. But that is tiring work, too; I am also on my feet all evening, cleaning offices or homes if it's the weekend.

I don't usually get home until after 10 or 11, and by then of course the children are asleep. This wouldn't be so bad, if I were able to see them in the morning; but I have to be at the school again for seven o'clock in the morning. And it's like that, most days; out at 5:30, back at 11. Sometimes I have a morning off on the weekends, or the evening off on the weekdays, depending on my schedule but... when I get that time, it's all I can do not to fall asleep, let alone do something fun with my children. I barely see them.

Rebecca works nearly 80 hours each week to bring home enough money to pay the rent on her two-bedroom house. The fallout from this lifestyle, she says, is significant; she does not have enough time to spend with her children, and when she does have some time off, she is simply too tired to enjoy it. This is evident in her face and demeanour. She is languid, as though exhausted, and has very little energy. Her interview was rescheduled multiple times because she was “too tired.” She says she cannot properly look after her health, that she barely has time to cook herself a meal before going to bed each night, let alone find time for relaxation or personal hobbies. Were it not for a disabled neighbour who babysat her children weekday mornings and evenings, she would be unable to maintain her family’s cohesion in the face of her extreme working hours and lack of support. Rebecca does not believe this is a sustainable situation, as she describes below:

It’s not sustainable, I know that. I’ve been at this for over two years now; since the divorce. I am just not sure how long I can keep it up, but it will be as long as I have to. There really is no choice. I want my kids to have a decent home, I won’t cram us on top of each other like some of these parents do. I’d rather work harder, so that they can have a better life.

I just hope that help comes soon, otherwise I really worry about myself. How long can I keep this up for? I don’t have any time for myself. I’ve always worked you know, even when I was married; but I used to have time to do other things. I used to knit... or read... but now, all I do is work and sleep. Work and sleep. Work and sleep. It’s depressing, and it’s slowly taking its toll on me. I hope help

comes soon, because... I just don't know how long I can keep on going with things the way they are now. I couldn't do this for another ten years, never seeing my children, and never having time for myself. I hope help comes soon.

Rebecca and Omar tell two sides of the problem facing low-income families in London, particularly single-parent households. They cannot afford what they call “decent” housing without working multiple jobs; they must therefore either compromise on the amount they work or the quality of their housing, if they have no external support to fall back upon. Omar has sacrificed the quality of his housing, and that has infringed upon the nature of the time spent with his daughters. Though he is available to spend more time with them, the quality and quantity of space they have to enjoy their time together is significantly reduced. Rebecca, on the other hand, has made the decision to work 80 hours per week to improve the quality and quantity of the space available to her family, but at significant cost to the amount of time she is able to spend with them. Both Omar and Rebecca expressed secondary problems arising from their housing situations, but family was a central part of their narratives and this is a theme that was repeated throughout other interviews with participants with parental responsibilities. Omar and Rebecca’s cases serve to illustrate that low-income families without external support from extended family, friends, or the state face a no-win scenario in places with high housing demand, such as London. Social housing aims to ameliorate the worst parts of this problem, and indeed both Rebecca and Omar look to institutions of social housing for assistance but have yet to receive any. What is most striking about these two cases is how they perfectly

demonstrate the costs and benefits of one another's decisions, in an environment absent of external support such as family.

In contrast, many households participating in this research could draw on support from extended family, and this caused them to view the challenge of family in a housing-scarce environment differently. This was particularly true amongst households that originated in London, rather than immigrating to London from elsewhere as both Omar and Rebecca did. The tendency for participating households native to London was not to rent privately at all, but to move in with one's parents or other family members in their childhood homes. This allowed such participants to eliminate the cost of housing entirely without sacrificing the quality of the housing itself. This often came at the cost of increased overcrowding, as the home would be host to three generations as well as frequently cohabitating adult siblings. Homes meant for two generations, arranged in a nuclear family, would therefore be host to three complete generations and often included third-generation cousins. Such homes were truly overcrowded, yet parental participants expressed many emotions that went beyond simple overcrowding. The perceived norm by such applicant households was that, to quote one applicant, "parents should be able to provide a home of their own for their children." Yet in these cases, parents were not providing these homes and this frequently led to feelings of guilt and inadequacy. These emotions negatively affected participants' moods, which then fed negatively back into the psychology of the extended household, creating a downward spiral that was difficult to break free of.

The case of Aaron is a particularly powerful representation of this category of narrative. Aaron is in his mid-thirties, and lives with his wife, two children, his

younger brother, his brother's girlfriend, his mother and his father in his parent's three-bedroom detached house in Barking, East London. Aaron and his wife occupy one bedroom; his son and daughter, both under ten, occupy a second bedroom; his mother and father the third; and his brother and brother's girlfriend have turned the sitting room into a fourth bedroom. There are therefore three couples and two children, eight people altogether, living in a home that hosted only four when Aaron was a child. Occupancy of the household has literally doubled. Fortunately, the house has plenty of storage in the form of an attic, basement, detached garage, and tool shed, as well as a separate dining room. Aaron says the family does manage to exist somewhat peacefully in this space, though he says it is sometimes a struggle. Everyone's gathered personal possessions do not leave much space for living; Aaron's brother commented that it felt like living in a storage unit, a statement to which Aaron readily agreed. Suitcases full of clothes were stacked to the ceiling, and piles of children's toys littered the dining room. The closets cannot be opened without spilling their contents across the hardwood floors, and there is not much space in the house that is not dedicated to storing something. These conditions cause Aaron great guilt, not for himself but for how his children live. This is evident in the passage below, where Aaron discusses the differences between his own childhood living situation and that of his children, and which ends with Aaron admitting that he feels like a failure as a father:

It's like this, okay? My son and daughter, they share a bedroom that my brother used to have to himself. I had my own bedroom too. Why do they have to share, when I didn't have to? It's not even subtle, if you take my meaning – it's obvious. They share, I

didn't have to; so what am I doing wrong, here? How does that make me feel? They don't really have a living room to run around in, either, which I did. It makes me feel like a failure as a father, you know? I shouldn't have had kids if I couldn't take proper care of them, like.

I mean, look at this place. First of all, and I don't think anyone in my family would disagree with me, but this house has seen better days. It was great when I was young, but it is in need of some maintenance, a refresh if you will. The fittings are all about thirty years old, and the whole thing is just not modern. Then you throw us, and all of our stuff on top of it. I mean, look at the piles of stuff around... there's barely space to move around, let alone room for the kids to play, as children do – or, should do.

It isn't just about, like, physical, actual space though. It's about the spirit of the place. My parents are getting on in years, and they're doing us a great favour by letting us stay here. So it's important that we respect them, give them the space they deserve, and all. But what's that mean for the kids? They have to tip toe around, like it wasn't their house, because it isn't. They can't be kids, because it's so full of people, and especially because of my mum and dad in the other rooms. They can't be kids. And that's on me I guess, because I'm not a good enough breadwinner, I guess.

And then for my parents, too. They're getting on, shouldn't have to put up with this. It's hard on them, too, and that makes me

feel like a failure as a son. They gave me everything I needed to succeed, but here I am moved back in with them, and with a family to boot. That's not fair for them, is it? Not fair at all.

So I guess that makes me a failure all around, doesn't it?

Aaron's case illustrates that for less affluent families in London, the housing situation has gotten considerably worse over the past thirty years in an observable manner. As Aaron correctly identifies, were he in the same position as sole breadwinner for his family, it is likely that during the 80s he would have been able to provide a home for his family either on his own income or with assistance from the government in the form of social rented housing. Aaron's children must instead share a bedroom in an already crowded home, the same home that Aaron himself grew up in and shared only with his brother and parents. The comparison is stark and obvious, and affects Aaron's state of mind which in turn affects the seven people he lives with. Below, Aaron attributes this to his own failures to establish economic independence.

I tell you, the guilt keeps me up some nights, it does. But what to do? Move out? I could never afford it, not without help, and that's sure not coming. And I shudder to think about the kinds of places we could afford on our income. I don't have to use my imagination, either – I have looked, and there's no way I'm putting my family through that. Better to be here, though it does make me feel bad. Like, you know, a failure, a bit. Like, can't I provide better? But no, I can't. I just can't.

It makes me feel like it was a mistake, starting a family.

Granted, it wasn't exactly on purpose, but we've tried to do the right thing. I work, and my wife works a bit too – but I try to be the wage earner so she can spend time with the kids. We're trying to keep our family intact, if you understand what I mean? For us, that means living with my parents, crowded though it is. That keeps us together. Otherwise, my wife would have to work a lot more, and I probably would, too. And we would never see our kids.

So that's the sacrifice we make. But it drives me batty, it does. I just look at my kids, and I see them packed in that little room, and I see how they have to walk on eggshells around here. I just feel like I'm not doing a good enough job as a father. The guilt really gets to me, sometimes. Why did we go forward with this whole thing? We thought it would be easier to find housing, never really thought of it, really. But now... I'm just very guilty, that's it. Ashamed. It's shameful, it is, not providing for your family.

The feelings of guilt Aaron confesses to above are not exceptional; amongst participants with childcare responsibilities that were also living with extended family or friends, most at least commented upon the guilt they felt in not being able to “provide for their family,” and many went into some length to describe it. Aaron's case is the most illustrative of this point, for he was eloquent and open in expressing it, yet other interviewees expressed similar perspectives.

For participants with children, family was a significant theme in discussing their social rented housing applications. Almost universally, such participants

sought social rented housing to improve the living conditions of their families, particularly their children. Continued failure at accessing social rented housing led to three primary responses: those participants, like Aaron, with parents living in London and who could accommodate them, frequently made the decision to move in with their parents or other family members to ease the economic burden. Yet, they experienced significant guilt for it both because they were infringing on others' space and because they were not able to provide to their children the amount of space they would like. Others, like Rebecca and Omar, did not have recourse to family in London. Rebecca worked two jobs to be able to rent what she considered decent housing, yet suffered from the problems associated with long working hours and in particular regretted not being able to spend more time with their family. Omar compromised on the quality of his housing so that he could afford to work less and spend time with his children, but was clearly ashamed of the quality of his housing particularly because it rendered him unsuitable to host his children as a result. Both the decision to work more for better housing, and to work less for more time, were common responses to the scarcity of affordable housing in the private rented market.

Each group of participants responded to the fundamental challenge of providing quality housing to their family in a different way, yet almost universally, housing and family were intertwined more strongly than nearly any other element of analysis. The lack of social rented housing had a direct and observable impact on the ability of participants to establish what they would call good conditions for their families, and they were not hesitant in discussing this or relaying the very emotional nature of the impact of housing on their personal, family lives.

Poor Housing

The third dominant theme that emerged regarding the living conditions of interviewees for this research was poor housing conditions. As described above, participants of this research mostly either rented privately or shared accommodation with a family member; for those that rented privately, housing quality was a significant problem. The Labour government in 2006 wrote that the private housing market could and should act as a secondary source of housing for those that would fail to qualify for social rented housing as expenditures in that sector continued to diminish. This backup function, however, has occurred at the very lowest end of the private rented market, with the worst homes logically being rented to those that can pay the least for them. Participants to this research have certainly been amongst this group, unable as they are to pay anything more than a bare minimum of rent without working deleterious hours. This chapter has already hinted at a few elements of poor housing standards amongst participants, so will first turn to these cases to explore this theme more fully.

Consider Omar, from above. He rents one of five-bedrooms in a Tottenham walk-up, which allows him to pay a much lower rent than would otherwise be possible. He does this so that he can work fewer hours and spend more time with his children, even though his house is not large or private enough to host his children. He makes more sacrifices, however, than just the amount of space available to him. The fixings in Omar's home appear to be at least thirty years old; the refrigerator is an avocado green that appears to date from the 70s; the sinks are covered with lime scale and sputter inconsistently when the taps are opened. The

toilets both leak non-sewage water across the floor at a slight, but steady rate. The flat has many problems, which Omar lists below:

Yeah, you know, this place has its quirks, to put it mildly. If I was being honest, though, I'd call this house a piece of shit. A total shithole, yeah. It's cheap, so I don't really mind, that's part of how I can afford to live, you know? But, there are just so many problems. Nothing works like it's supposed to, when it works at all.

The shower runs cold in the mornings, because the boiler is shot and can't heat the water quickly. But during the day, the water comes out boiling hot, and you have to be careful about it. One of my flatmates got scalded taking a shower a few months back, because he hopped in in the afternoon without checking first. And the sinks, they're all clogged up, they just won't drain properly. We've tried buying drain cleaner, but it really needs a proper plumber. We can't afford one, and the landlord won't pay for it, so we just have to make do. And have you seen the cracking, sloughing paint? And the mould in the bathroom, because the fan doesn't work? The windows don't properly close, either, so there's always a draft in the winter. We don't bother running the heating, because it just bleeds out through the windows or up into the fifteen foot loft, and costs a bomb, much more than any of us can afford.

Yes, the list of things wrong with this place is as long as my leg. That's part of the reason I don't want my daughters around,

too, but not the most of it. I would demand that the landlord make repairs, if I could – but I'm not technically on the lease, just subletting. So I can't say anything, and neither can the men on the lease, because they don't want to be found out to be subletting, anyway. So there's really nothing to be done, but to live with it.

Omar has identified one problem that was rife amongst participants of this research: not being on the lease of his current residence. This is indirectly related to poor housing because only leaseholders have the right to demand repairs. Furthermore, as Omar points out, subletting is itself a violation of most residential leases, therefore lease-holding residents are less likely to demand repairs because they do not want to invite the landlord or agents of the landlord into the house for fear of being discovered subletting. For these reasons, many necessary repairs go unreported. Many participants were in a similar situation, subletting a room from another tenant, often with a group of adults that had inherited the property from previous leaseholders or sublet tenants.

On the one hand, living with low quality housing seems like it should contravene some basic human principle; on the other hand, low quality housing which is charged at a lower rate does fill the niche for affordable rented housing, when social rented housing itself does not fill that niche. Some participants were very aware of the transactional nature of the housing quality problems they faced. Thomas, a man in his mid-fifties living in West Ham, was able to describe what he thought was his place in the economy very well. He shared a two-bedroom flat, built over a funeral home, with a friend of over ten years. The building was very old, built of yellow brick, and part of a nearby estate that was constructed after the

Second World War. The fittings in the apartment had not been updated in decades, and were in bad need of repair and refurbishment. Everything technically functioned, so neither man felt the need to ask for repairs despite the age of the building, yet Thomas was able to give a succinct description of the economic pressures on lower income people in a competitive housing market, and why they accepted such poor-quality housing. He expressed his feelings about it in the passage below, which were unusually fatalistic about his place “at the bottom.”

It's economy, that's it. There is a market for this kind of home: old, worn down, everything squeaks and barely works. No, it isn't always pleasant to live in a place like this. The boiler costs a bomb to run so we do without hot water for most of the day, and there are various small problems that add up to a lot, once you work it all out. The windows, the doorframes, they're all loose and let the winter in. I could go on, but why bother? It's enough to say, yes, it's a problem. It would be nice to live in a home that didn't have these problems, but we can't afford them. And so it goes back to economics.

It's like this: we're at the bottom of the pecking order. We can't afford to pay more, so we don't rent good housing privately. We can't get the help from the government like we might once have been able to, because we don't have families or problems, other than the quality of the place, so it's unlikely we'll get into a council house. Where does that leave us? Renting where no one else wants to rent. There's nothing else for it. We're at the bottom;

it sucks, but there it is all the same. What else can we do? It's what we can afford.

Positioning, that's what it's all about. We deserve, I guess you could say, to live in this place, because of the poor decisions we've made and the fact that no one needs us. We're not breadwinners, are we? Let the good, affordable places go for them. Sure I'd love to get in one, but I get that there's only so much to go around, and an old fart like me... well, I don't need it, and maybe I don't deserve it. So, this is where I end up. What else?

Thomas gives his interview from on an old, overstuffed chair that was as worn as the rest of his apartment. The air was musty, perhaps from the mould that had taken root in the cabinet under the kitchen sink. He wondered if living in a home that would be deemed by many as unfit for occupation was what he deserved because he had “not done enough with his life.” Though Thomas spoke more clearly on this idea of deservedness than other participants, it was nonetheless a prevalent theme throughout many interviews. People were largely divided on the idea. Many equated their ability to pay for housing with how much they deserved that housing; because they could not afford to pay for better housing, the housing they had must therefore be what they deserved. This perspective was associated with more passive responses to social rented housing application. In Thomas' case, he had filed several applications to social rented housing, but only to traditional waiting lists held by housing associations. He declined to participate in any bidding process, or take any active role in his

application whatsoever because he felt his place was “part of the natural pecking order.”

Other participants who experienced poor housing conditions did not feel that it was right that they did, and did not embrace this fatalistic perspective. Such individuals perceived their lack of ability to pay for higher quality housing as not affecting their deservedness of decent housing, and were sufficiently riled by the conditions they had to undergo while waiting for social housing or searching for other housing solutions. This perspective was often associated with a more active role in the hunt for social housing. The stronger an individual felt about the injustice of their current living conditions, it seemed, the better informed and motivated they were about social housing generally.

Dianna, for example, was a single mother living in a former council-block in Tower Hamlets. Her home was a truly dilapidated apartment in a large complex. The hardwood floors had not been resealed in decades, and were beginning to lose their integrity; the kitchen was over thirty years old and only occasionally functioned properly; the upstairs toilet leaked fresh water onto one of the downstairs bedrooms at irregular intervals; mismatched doors did not fit their frames, clearly borrowed from other properties; there was evidence of rodent infestations; and many other problems. At some point in the past – likely at the end of the 1980’s – the block had been sold by the council to a private owner, who then began renting units on the private market without carrying out any significant improvement or maintenance works. Comparable social housing, meanwhile, underwent significant repair and refurbishment in the late 1990s and 2000s as part of the “Decent Homes” act. Without any of the benefits of this legislation, Dianna’s

home was on the verge of being uninhabitable. Yet, the original layout of the flat was ideal for a family of Dianna's size. It had three bedrooms, a living room with a dining nook, a separate kitchen, and one and one half bathrooms. It was situated near an Underground station that took Dianna across town to her job and was adjacent to a school that was built at the same time as the former council house. All of these positive features came at a good price, and so Dianna was happy to have the place even if the housing quality was, as she put it, "abysmal." Still, she recognised that the quality of housing was unacceptable for her children, and so was very active in searching for other solutions including social rented housing. In the narrative below, she discusses the poor quality of her housing, but also discusses how it is at least affordable for her family and therefore serves a purpose.

This place, it isn't good. It's not a good house, to be honest with you. Everything in here is ancient, and none of it works. The cooker is off, and most of the burners don't work, and that makes it quite hard to make dinner, you know? I mean, just look at the walls. They need a new paint job, they're disgusting. And the floors... the boards are cracked in places, and you can tell that they're just old. The doors don't fit. Everything's rusted or falling apart in some way. The sinks all leak. The doors aren't quite right. It uses electricity like nobody's business; I'm not sure why, we try to keep our usage down but it just goes and goes.

And there's mice, mice everywhere. You can see their droppings in the morning, every morning. They're all throughout the building. The landlord says he's doing something about it, but it

never gets better. And it's disgusting, and I know it's not healthy for the children.

But most of all, it's just shabby, if you know what I mean? Like, run down, low quality. More than any of the specific problems, the appearance of the place is just bad. It doesn't feel like a good house, you know? The problems are bad enough, but it's the... age of the place, and the feeling that it hasn't been kept up. It makes you feel like a poor person, if that makes sense? It's not good for your state of mind, to live like this. Dilapidated, that's the word.

I guess that makes it sound really bad. And it is. But the thing is, this is what we can get. Everyone has their own bedroom, so that's something, and more than a lot of my friends' children have besides. And it's something I can afford on my wages, so that's something else. Maybe if my parents were still alive, we could move in with them, and that might be better. Some of my co-workers have moved back home with their kids, and that works for them; but that's not an option for us, is it? This place, the kids have an easy time getting to school, I have an easy time getting to work, it's got plenty of space so I can afford the rent.

So no, it's not good housing at all. But it works for us, it's what we need. It doesn't make me feel good, needing to raise my children in this environment, but I think it's the best decision for now.

Tower blocks, many having been transferred from council to private or housing association ownership, remain notorious for housing quality problems. Dianna's home was certainly an example of poor housing in former council blocks. Participant occupation of former council blocks was another observed pattern throughout this research, and many of the other cases presented throughout this research will be set within former council housing tower blocks. Having described the regrettable state in which she lives, Dianna then turned to her plans for the future as shown below. She appears to be hopeful for the time being that she will be allocated a home, or that she will otherwise be able to find better housing in the future.

But we won't be here forever, you know? It's only temporary. I've got myself on the waiting list at this council, and also two neighbouring councils. I bid every week, and we're moving up the list slowly but surely. I've also done a lot of research into all of the housing associations around here and have put our names down wherever I can. And, I go out of the way to call the council to update them on our living conditions – they say they'll send someone out to see if we can get special status, but we'll see. And... even if we don't get a council house, I don't want to live here for more than a year longer, I've decided. My job pays well enough that I'm saving a bit, and if I have to rent somewhere else by next year, I will... you know, find a better place. So I have a lot of coals in the fire.

This place just isn't good enough for my kids. We deserve better.

On the one hand, the lack of maintenance had kept Dianna's rents more affordable; on the other hand, it had significantly reduced the quality of her housing to a standard which she deemed barely liveable. Dianna and Thomas reacted to the similarly poor quality of their housing in very different ways: Thomas felt that he deserved that quality of housing because he could not afford better, or had not done more with his life; Dianna believed her and her family absolutely deserved better, regardless of what they could or could not pay. This led to a difference in Thomas and Dianna's engagement with the social rented housing application process. Dianna was very active; Thomas was almost completely unengaged. This pattern repeated itself throughout many interviews. Participants who believed they were deserving of high quality housing regardless of their ability to pay for it were more likely to be more active in their social rented housing application; participants who were more resigned to the quality of housing they could afford were less likely to be so zealous in their pursuit of social rented housing.

Since the conclusion of research for this thesis, Dianna's housing has been condemned and slated for demolition. The land will be cleared and new residential units will be built in their place. The wall that has been built around the demolition site claims that the site will offer "new affordable homes," but the meaning of this phrase remains unclear. As discussed in the introductory chapters to this thesis, affordable housing is often taken to mean affordable owner-occupation by shared ownership, first-time buyer mortgage assistance, or below-market lettings that can

charge up to 80% of market price. Such programs would be unlikely to benefit Dianna. This problem will be discussed further in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

The problems of poor housing appear to be viewed by applicants to social housing not as a question of fundamental human rights to decent and habitable homes, but as something that can be acceptably compromised upon to achieve another goal. Yet some of these compromises seem rather steep. Amongst participants choosing to rent private accommodations, poor housing was a significant problem. Most such households had to deal with ageing or partially functional appliances, leaky pipes, poor insulation, ill-fitting doors, mouldy corners, and poorly maintained properties in general. The advantage to occupying such flats was significantly reduced rent, which in turn allowed participants to work less or occupy more space, albeit of a lower quality. Notably, they were not happy to make this exchange. Instead they were acutely aware of the poor quality of their housing, and many participants did find it acceptable. Participants made the sacrifice in housing quality because they prioritised other aspects of life, but many were determined to find superior housing through local authorities, housing associations, or eventually renting a more expensive home. For the time being, however, most private-letting tenants were stuck with poor housing of some kind.

Conclusion of Chapter 3: Living Conditions

This chapter has focused on the living conditions which participants withstand while they wait for social housing. The three most significant living conditions communicated by participants were overcrowding, family life, and poor

housing. The experiences of participants on these issues can be divided in a few ways which have been discussed above. Nearly every participant in this research was found to be overcrowded according to the bedroom standard. Though all participants shared some social and psychological concerns about the effects of having insufficient space, those with or without parental obligations experienced overcrowding differently with the latter group likely to express significant guilt for their children's experience. On a related note, family life was the second most common theme reported by participants with respect to living condition. Participants with families indicated that the nature of their housing seriously affected their family life. Different families responded in different ways: some rented lower quality or smaller homes to spend more time with their children; others worked many more hours to afford better homes but spent less time there as a result; others lived with extended family, overcrowding multiple households and feeling guilt in doing so. Finally, the third most common theme reported by participants with respect to living condition was poor housing, which negatively impacted those renting privately in particular. To cut costs, many households rented lower quality housing and dealt with problems that would be deemed unacceptable by many. Responses to this again split the population: some seemed to believe that poor housing was what they deserved, and had resigned themselves to it; others believed they deserved better, and actively sought out superior housing through social and private means.

For the participants of this research, it was their poor living conditions that drove them to apply for social rented housing. These living conditions were central to the narratives they shared; they imparted on the participants the emotional

impetus to act, and likewise, impart in this research a moral imperative to give voice to what these people endured in their housing struggles. The purpose of this chapter has been to communicate these living conditions. This is part of the purpose of structural violence research, to advocate for research participants by disseminating the narratives of participants. However, structural violence also seeks to place these narratives into a broader historical and geographical context. In this case, although participants to this research felt that the conditions under which they lived qualified them for social rented housing, they were disappointed. Most participants felt justified in seeking social rented housing based on overcrowding. However, government initially regulated overcrowding not as a humanitarian effort, as believed by the participants of this research, but as a public service to abate nuisance and poor sanitation arising in Victorian slums. Humanitarian relief of overcrowding was not implemented in the UK until the 1950s, after the Beveridge Report indicated that it should be so. By 1980, large-scale investment in social rented housing had decreased drastically, and continues to do so. This has limited the ability of local authorities to abate overcrowding, preferring to allocate limited homes to more emergency cases. Therefore, although the participants to this research were often raised in rented social houses that were awarded on less meritorious humanitarian claims than their own, the increasingly limited nature of social rented housing resources has limited their ability to gain access to such housing themselves. In short, it is no longer enough to be overcrowded – but participants were unaware of this.

These three aspects of living conditions – overcrowding, family life, and poor housing – formed the basis of most participants' requests for social rented

housing. They felt that the undesirable conditions under which they lived qualified them for housing assistance from the government because their lives would be significantly improved if they were better housed. In most cases, this was true. Participants not only qualified for housing assistance but also for preferred treatment in the allocation process. This preferred treatment, however, would not be enough to gain them access to social housing. As participants found out, it is not enough to be overcrowded, overworked, and poorly housed in one's attempts to gain a social tenancy. It seemed that one must not only be preferred, but indeed be an emergency case, to have quick access. This was a significant misunderstanding on the part of almost every participant. The specific harms caused by this misunderstanding are the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 4:

Institutional Harm and Self-Sabotage

In applying a structural violence approach to social housing in the United Kingdom, this thesis has sought to identify the institutional sources of harm to the social housing applicants that have participated in this research to answer the research question “have reductions in the supply of social rented housing and changes to social rented housing allocation harmed those seeking social rented housing, and if so how?” The previous chapter started this work by examining the conditions participants live in as a result of their inability to access social housing. This chapter continues to examine harm by analysing the damaging characteristics of social housing allocation, itself. The way social housing allocation now functions in the UK was observed to cause harm in several ways to participants of this research. The most commonly observed harm was caused by uncertain waiting times; not allocating homes to elderly participants who needed homes; and social isolation resulting from damage to relationships between participant host households. Each of these sources of harm can be traced directly to the way social housing is allocated.

Not all harm observed during this research had an institutional source, however. Many participants were observed self-sabotaging by following maladaptive housing strategies in contradiction to information provided to them by some housing organisations. Sometimes this took the form of optimism in the face of evidence to the contrary; other times participants insisted on being housed in a particular locality, despite a particularly impacted waiting list in that area; finally,

participants were commonly observed to be rather uneducated about social rented housing policy, despite their supposed reliance on it to gain a home. All of these aspects represent poor decisions on the part of applicants, which do not have an institutional root cause. This self-sabotaging pattern is not one which structural violence is particularly well-suited for analysing. It suggests that, though patterns of victimisation implemented through institutions are significant, the actions of the individual can counteract or exacerbate that violence. Though it has been a useful tool particularly for filling in the gaps of participant knowledge around the reasons for failed social housing applications, structural violence as an approach has not been particularly useful in dealing with these individual failures that have relatively little to do with systemic violence.

Each of these forms of harm that were observed during the research for this thesis, both institutional and self-inflicted, will be discussed below.

Institutional Harm

Structural violence is a useful method for exploring the connection between how institutions function and the potential harm done to individuals as a result of these functions. Institutions, such as social housing, are vulnerable to large-scale shifts in history, politics, and economics. Individuals are then vulnerable to institutions themselves, therefore it is often through institutions that individuals experience changes in larger-scale forces. Structural violence can erode (Galtung 1985) the agency of the individual. This would appear to be the case with social housing in the United Kingdom. Broadly speaking, participants of this research did report feeling harmed by the institutions of social housing allocation. They felt as if

something had been taken, including their sense of control over their own housing situations. This chapter seeks to identify the harm done by these changes, as communicated by participants to this research, before going on to examine the harm that participants have caused to themselves.

Farmer et al (2006) writes of structural violence that “historically (and often economically) given processes and forces conspire to constrain individual agency. Structural violence is visited on those whose social status denies them access to the fruits of progress.” In this sense, the shift to a longer and, from the perspective of applicants, more capricious system of social housing allocation has put non-emergency applicants very much at the mercy of historical and economic forces. These come in the form of changes to allocation policy that applicants only learn of through experience, and results in them attempting to make their way in a competitive private market that they are not fully able to participate in. This lack of ability to fully participate has many effects on other aspects of participants’ lives. These will be discussed below according to the themes that most commonly arose during participant interviews.

Uncertain Waiting Time

The harm done to participants by changes to social housing took many varying forms, but none was more dominant than unexpected waiting time. When making initial application for social housing, most participants had the expectation that they would be housed in a relatively short period commonly communicated to be between six months and two years of waiting time. Most participants had been made to wait for considerably longer than this, however, with two or three years

being the most commonly cited waiting time experienced. This lengthened waiting time was viewed as harmful by participants, though they viewed it differently according to age. First, usually older applicants felt that their current applications to social housing were significantly more difficult than any previous applications they may have made. This, they argued, represented a clear degeneration in the services provided for them by the government and a surprise to them. Second, primarily younger applicants felt that successfully applying to social housing was virtually impossible now, whereas older generations had relative ease in their applications. Both groups therefore felt that something important had been taken from them when they found themselves unable to access social housing, despite themselves or older family members being able to access it relatively easily in the past. Participants initially had the expectation that when they applied for social housing, it would basically be available to them. In many cases they had then made decisions based on this erroneous belief, which led to negative consequences for them in their housing circumstances as presently experienced. These negatives were then frequently compounded by the undetermined amount of time they would need to wait before being allocated a home; in most cases, participants reported that housing officials were unable to give estimates of expected wait time.

The structural violence observed here is twofold. First, people remain unaware of increased waiting times in social housing, and are therefore likely to make poor decisions as they seek to apply for social housing. Second, the indeterminate time for which applicants must wait means they both cannot make effective decisions and must live with a large degree of uncertainty in their housing situation for unknown length of time.

Jennifer, for example, is an Enfield homeseeker in her early 50s. She lives together with her husband, younger daughter, and niece in her elderly father's three-bedroom home. She is experienced with the changes that have taken place in housing allocation over the past 30 years because she used to rent a council house from the local authority, starting in the late 1980s. She moved back to London last year after living in Birmingham for fifteen years, and has been surprised at how much more difficult it is to get into social housing now than it was previously. Here she discusses how different things are now than they were:

Things are really different now. Back in the '80s, when we first went into council housing... I remember that like it was yesterday. First they put us into temporary accommodation, and back then there was a time limit to how long they could do that for. They've done away with that now. Anyway, we were housed in temporary accommodation for ten months before they found us a permanent place, a flat for my husband, baby and me, here in Enfield. Just ten months, even though it felt like a long time back then. Now we've been told it could be anywhere between five and ten years, minimum, if you can believe it. We couldn't. We've only been waiting for a year, and it was a real shock to be told it could be four more at least.

In addition to living with her younger daughter, husband and niece, Jennifer babysits her older daughter's two school-aged children so that her daughter can work at a local shop. Four generations are crowded into three bedrooms, and the sound is overwhelming in the afternoon. The great-grandfather sits in the lounge,

watching a nature program on television while his two great-grandchildren watch cartoons in the kitchen. Jennifer's husband stands a few feet away as Jennifer answers question; he is cooking dinner for the kids while talking on the telephone. Other family members come and go. The home is filled with a cacophony, and although it is clean and organised, every surface is taken up by something or the other. Children's toys litter the floor; schoolbooks cover the dining table; groceries sit on the kitchen counter; dishes fill the sink. The coat rack is well beyond its capacity, three garments at least adorning each hook. The overall impression is of a house that is filled to bursting with people. Jennifer gestures around her before continuing to discuss how she was not aware when moving back to London, that it would be so difficult to access social rented housing and that she would need to live with her father for as long as the council says she will need to:

I didn't realise we would be living like this for so long. We came back down here to help support family – to take care of my niece for my sister. We didn't want to move the girl out of her school, and my father's getting older, so we thought it would be a good idea to come back to London. We're from here. But... we didn't know it would be this hard. When we moved to Birmingham, we got a flat straight away. There wasn't any difficulty, no waiting period at all. My husband went up before us, and I think it took him six or twelve weeks to get a nice three bedroom for us. But things have gotten terrible here since then. We didn't know when we came back down how long it would take for the council to house us.

We make it work, you know, we do. Mutual respect, that's the key. Like my dad, he probably wishes he had more space, so we try to give him space whenever we can. Keep the kids quiet. That sort of thing. And for each other, too. We're stacked up in here, and it's important to know how to do that, be respectful. But it's not ideal. My [younger] daughter, she spends a lot of time out of the house – with friends and family – because of it. And I'd really like if my niece could have her own room. That's important for a child. But she just can't right now, and I don't know... five years seems like a long time to wait around. And it might be longer. We don't know.

Repeatedly, Jennifer confirms that she did not know it would be as difficult as it has been for her household to access social housing. She has had previous social housing both in London and Birmingham, and in both cases, was housed socially with relative ease. She implies that if she had known it would be this difficult, she might have made other decisions. Perhaps they would have moved her niece up to Birmingham instead of moving back to London. The challenge they face now, however, is needing housing in competitive private and social rented housing markets. They cannot access social rented housing now, yet they cannot afford to rent privately either. Instead Jennifer herself has opted to live with her elderly father, which has resulted in significant overcrowding for the family though again, not statutory overcrowding. This can have significant psychological effects, which Jennifer speaks at some length about later in the interview:

You know, sometimes my husband comes home, and he just wants some space. And who am I to blame him? I've worked too, I

know how it is when you have to be around people all day. You just need some time to decompress, as they say. But the thing is, when you're living on top of each other like this, you can't get that time. And it... well, sometimes it puts him in a bad mood. And then he takes it out on someone – maybe me, maybe the kids. Not my dad, thank God. It isn't him, it's the circumstances. But then, you know, that person, me or whoever, that puts them in a bad mood too. And then it swings around. And pretty soon, the whole house is rotten with it. And there's really nothing that can be done.

And then there's the privacy issue. Of course, we never have a private moment. That's one thing. But, like, my younger daughter. She's a university graduate, for God's sake! She should be living in her own house, with her own room... not sharing with her little niece. A girl her age wants some space, and she deserves it, too. But she doesn't get it. So she leaves, spends more time out than I wish she did. So it splits us up, you see, in more ways than one. Sometimes it's emotional, sometimes it's physical. But you just have to take that space. We really try to respect each other as much as we can, and I think we do a good job of it given everything. But, it just affects you.

The problems Jennifer and her family face daily are indeed challenging, and demonstrate several examples of what Farmer (1996) and Galtung (1985) would term structural violence. The lack of space for her and her family has psychologically damaging effects on everyone in the household, preventing them

from meeting one of their self-described essential needs – privacy. This theme of lack of privacy will be repeated in many narratives presented in this thesis, and so deprivation of privacy is one of the most significant forms of structural violence observed to have taken place within the interviews conducted for this thesis. Lacking social housing as a previous generation might have been allocated, households interviewed for this research were often stressed because of their inability to obtain sufficient personal, private space. This, they indicated, was fundamentally damaging to their quality of life.

Jennifer indicates that the length of time they have been told they must wait further compounds the challenges she faces, as does the uncertainty of how long this time will be. In fact, she is very well positioned to speak to the expectations she has of housing time for she has a particularly interesting housing history. After getting married and leaving her parent's home in her early twenties, she was first housed socially in a London council flat in the 80s with her husband and first child. Racially motivated anti-social behaviour forced Jennifer's family to relocate within the borough to another council flat, and several years later, they bought into one of the first shared-ownership schemes, moving again. Unfortunately the family found the dual mortgage and rent too financially burdensome. Both parents had to work long hours, which took them away from their children and each other. Deciding they might be better served outside of London, they moved to Birmingham where they were housed by the council after a very brief waiting period. They lived here until moving back to London, as described above, to adopt a niece. She is struggling to find social rented housing in the same way she has in the past. In each of her previous applications she was housed in less

than a year, but now she has been informed that she will probably need to wait at least five years, and possibly up to ten. Her shock is palpable even a year after being informed of this. In the passage below, she communicates how surprised she is in the change of the waiting time for social rented housing, and how she felt something had been taken from her:

It doesn't make sense to me. How can it have gotten so much worse, in such a short span? Before, it felt like someone was taking care of us. We had options. There were people we talked to that explained things to us and took care of us. Now, not only does it feel like no one cares about what happens to us or what we're going through, it feels like something's been taken away. Like, yesterday, we had this thing – a council house – and we gave it up, because we thought it would be there for us in the future. Now we find out it isn't there, and no one told us. That's the thing. No one told us they were taking it away. If we'd known it might not be there again, we might not have given it up in the first place. But we didn't know. And now it's gone, it's been taken from us.

Jennifer felt very strongly that something had literally been taken from her. This was an incredibly common response, by both old and young applicants, to the changes in the availability of social rented housing. Jennifer is representative of the older population who have been through the social housing application process before.

Derrick, however, is a twenty-five year old resident of Haringey. Although Derrick is too young to have direct experience of social housing allocation during

more accessible periods, he did still come to the waiting list with expectations that were not fulfilled. In his case, he expected for his small household to be housed easily because of his mother's experience in the 80s, and he is angry and frustrated at not having the same opportunities that previous generations have had. He describes this frustration below, drawing on his mother's experience as a reference point:

It's frustrating, you know? Really frustrating. I want to move out of my mom's place, and I feel like, she got her shot, my mom. We're living in a council house now, or what used to be a council house. She got it back in the 80s, and didn't have to wait six years for it. That ain't fair, is it? She was a single parent; well, I'm a parent, and I'd like to be able to have custody of my daughter, which means I need a home of my own. She had a job; I have a job. I get that there are a lot more people looking now and a lot fewer places to put them, but six years? Really? I mean, doesn't that seem a bit extreme? I'm a hard-working member of society, and I'm not looking for a handout. Just a leg up, if you take my meaning.

Derrick had requested to be interviewed out of his home, because he wanted to speak about things without his family overhearing. He had suggested a local pub instead, and shakes his head before continuing. Derrek works at a construction job that takes him around north London. Most of his work consists of laying cement for new-build apartment buildings, and he is quick to point out the irony of building homes for other people when he is unable to provide a home for his own daughter. She can stay with him for a few days at a time by sleeping in his

room with him in his mother's house, but if Derrick wants her to live with him in a more permanent capacity she will need her own bedroom. In the passage below, Derrick reasons that this means it will be some time before his daughter can live with him, which causes him some visible distress. He again reiterates that he feels that something has been taken from him, in this case the chance to live with his daughter in a quality home.

A council house is the only way I'll be able to afford it on my pay, but they've told me I'm 'not a priority.' I can bid, but they say it'll probably be at least five or six years until I'm housed. I honestly wasn't expecting that. My mum had said it only took her so long to get our house now, less than a year I think. So I was just – well, it was a shock. A real shock. I heard that it was harder now than it ever has been, but damn, I wasn't expecting it to be that hard. Damn near impossible. My daughter will basically be half-grown by the time I get a place. So, what that tells me, is that it's on me. I just didn't know that.

*It's like, if I had been in the exact same boat -- what, fifteen years ago? Maybe less – they would have helped me. So between now and then, I've lost something, haven't I? Only, no one told me I'd lost it! So here I go, with my daughter, walking down to the council and asking for a house, thinking I'll get one *snap* like that. But no, "sorry," they say "we don't have any houses for you." Well, where did my house go? They had one for me, didn't they? My mum had one. But it's gone now. Where did it go?*

I know that's not the right way to think about it, kind of wrong-headed. But you've got to understand: that's how it feels. Like I have literally had something stolen from me. How am I to raise my child?

The young construction worker lives with his mother and two brothers in their three-bedroom, large-volume stock transfer house, where they have been housed since he was a child. He is the youngest of the three, but the only one with children of his own. Derrick grew up in a council house, and never questioned that one would be available for him when he was ready to start a family. He is no longer in a relationship with the mother of his child, but Derrick still believes he is entitled to a home so that his daughter can live with him. In a housing market as competitive as London's, he is unable to rent a home of his own, which means he spends less time with his daughter than he would like. Like many participants, Derrick highlights how he is fortunate to have housing, but goes on to describe how this housing does not meet his need:

I guess I'm fortunate in some ways. My brothers share a room, so that I can have my own – that way, when my daughter comes over, we can have the room to ourselves. That's great and all, I appreciate that, I do. Especially as I'm the youngest. But it's just not ideal. I'll tell you what I want: to have my daughter live with me. Right now, she lives with her mother, in her grandmother's house. She's got enough bedrooms for them all, so it is best that they live there given the current situation. I mean, she has her own room and all. But what would be better for me, is if I had my own

house, where she had her own room. That would be better. I just want to live in a home with my own daughter. Right now, she spends every other weekend at my mum's. But, there's just no space for us to be ourselves. My brothers are always around, with their girlfriends maybe; my mother's always around... and I feel like, it's hard to define my own family, if you know what I mean? I want it to be just her and me, daddy and his girl, you follow? But I can't have that now. Anyway, that is my dream, if I'm telling the truth. But... I just don't see how it's going to happen. Six years?

Derrick's situation is complicated by the separation between himself and his daughter's mother. As they are not cohabitating, and his ex-girlfriend's mother has a house large enough to house the family, it is logical that their daughter live with the mother. As his daughter, ex-girlfriend and himself are all housed relatively comfortably, even if not in a house of their own, the council has categorised each party's housing need as non-urgent. This, however, is little consolation to Derrick, who fixates on the time he has been told he will need to wait before being allocated a home. In his case, the local authority has told him it will be six years, but it is likely to be longer because he does not demonstrate any preferred needs. As more people apply for social housing with needs that the council is required to prefer, they will be placed towards the front of the social rented housing queue. It is likely that as this happens, Derrick's application will fall farther towards the back of the line, rather than closer to the front. Because of this, it is unlikely that Derrick will ever be housed socially though he is apparently unaware of this. Rather, he has

fixed himself on the six-year estimate given to him by a local authority housing officer.

Jennifer and Derrick are two different cases with the same essential problem: both were expecting assistance from the local authority in gaining social rented housing, and both were rebuffed in strong contrast to their expectations. In Jennifer's case, she had significant previous experience with social housing allocation, and drew on that experience to form her expectation. In Derrick's case, he was aware that his mother had gained a social tenancy relatively easily, and expected the same for himself and his burgeoning household. The expectations of both Jennifer and Derrick were so far from what they experienced, that they both felt like something had been taken from them. In contrast with a comparably positioned person in the 60s, 70s or 80s, perhaps this is true. Five or more years of waiting, as compared to less than a year wait, is a significant change for the worse.

The stories told by Jennifer and Derrick are both representative of the narratives of many older and younger participants, respectively. Most older participants had had previous experiences with social rented housing applications, and expressed that it was much easier then to gain access to social rented housing. Younger applicants drew on older relatives' experiences. Both groups felt that something had been taken from them because it is much more difficult now to obtain social housing than they or their relatives had experienced in the past. The change in social rented housing allocation from a timely, known period to a longer wait of variable length has been slow to take place and difficult to perceive. The majority of participants were unable to pinpoint why their waits were longer than expected, they simply knew that it was somehow so.

This links to structural violence. Farmer (2006) states that structural violence is acted on individuals and deprives them of their ability to provide a quality life for themselves, taking their choices from them. Though they are often aware that this has happened, Farmer argues, they are often unaware of the specific mechanisms by which this has happened because those mechanisms are enacted by systems, not individuals. This can be particularly damaging, because individuals often lack the capacity to respond to or even gain awareness of systemic challenges to their quality of life. Participants' perspectives on their failures to gain access to social rented housing are a good example of this. People interviewed for this research had expected to gain tenancy in a social rented housing unit in short order, but when they were unable to do this they were also unable to explain in a comprehensive manner why this was. They had been prevented from accessing a resource – affordable, quality housing – that is necessary for a good quality of life. As was discussed in the previous chapter, this inability has a systemic cause: an overall lack of government investment in rented, social housing. However, participants to this research were unable to identify this as the cause for their failure. They felt that they had lost something critical to their own quality of life; but they were unable to explain why exactly this was or how it had happened. This is exemplary of the kind of structural violence described by Farmer (1996), Galtung (1985) and Bourgois (2002) in their own studies of vulnerable populations, albeit with respect to access to housing rather than to medicine or legitimate economic participation.

Elderly Transfers

However, other participants suffered harm in more direct manners. In particular, elderly applicants who were already socially housed formed a minority of participants for this research project whose stories were particularly interesting. These individuals were normally prioritised for re-housing because they were either downsizing or had medical reasons for needing a different house. In several cases observed for this research, however, this rehousing had not taken place. The reasons for this varied. In some cases, though individuals expressed during their interviews that they had sufficient medical needs to be rehoused, the council had not yet deemed them to be so. In other cases, there was simply a lack of available and appropriate homes that met the applicant's needs.

Rose is in her 70's, and has lived by herself in her two bedroom home in Peckham since her husband passed away some years ago. Degeneration of her hips and knees has made it difficult for her to walk without feeling pain, so she uses a walker to move around the home. Her greatest difficulty is that her housing association flat is on the second story and there is no lift, so she has considerable difficulty navigating the stairs in and out of the home. Her primary complaint, as with most other participants, is the length of time she has had to wait for a new property to be allocated to her. In the passage below, Rose describes how long she has been waiting, her special need for a new flat, and how poorly her current experience compares to her previous experience:

I've been onto the council for two years now, that this place isn't suitable for me anymore. Two years. That is just unacceptable! Back in the 70's, when we got it, we got it right away. And it was

perfect for my husband and me, and our family. Two bedrooms, a back garden, it was everything we could ask for. But my sons have left now, they're living on their own, and the stairs up... I have a hard time with them. The council keeps offering me places, but I need somewhere on the ground floor, and they keep showing me places with steps up, either to the ground floor or to a second story. I know this is my last shot, so I'm not going to take a place unless it's the right one.

Having expressed herself with regards to waiting time, Rose goes on to show why her current housing is so inappropriate. To let visitors into her home without having to descend the stairs, Rose lowers a set of keys down on a string through her front, reception room window. One of her most significant fears is that one day, while doing this, she will fall out of the window. Indeed, Rose does appear to have challenges staying mobile. Her movements are stiff and obviously pained, and while talking and walking during her interview, she almost trips and falls on a pair of steps leading from the front door to the kitchen. "Happens every time," she says, looking back after recovering. Her home, an older council-turned-housing association walk-up built in the 60s, smells musty, and Rose is quick to show that her wallpaper is sloughing off as a result of excessive moisture. "It is obvious," she says, "that I need a new house." The council has offered Rose several ground floor homes, but because they have all had several steps in the entryway, she has declined each. The occupational therapist the council uses to review Rose's case has determined that she does not yet require a step-free home, which priority rules dictate must go to households who need them, primarily wheelchair users. Yet Rose is confident that

she will need a wheelchair soon enough. Rather than having to move again in a few years, she would rather find a step-free home now, particularly as steps already cause her a great deal of pain and discomfort. Rose thinks this is a reasonable request, and expected the council to be able to meet it without much difficulty. Her experience, however, has been considerably worse than her expectation, as she outlines below:

I was really expecting it to be a quick affair, because I remember when I was young, they were just giving houses away left and right it seemed. If you needed something, you basically got it. It wouldn't have been a problem then, I can tell you. So when I applied now, I guess I was expecting a little bit of help within a reasonable amount of time. Instead, what I've gotten is nothing, and I'm furious about it. They have an obligation to house me, but they aren't making good on it.

Rose says that she is willing to wait as long as it takes to get a step-free home, even if it means she will have to wait until her knees and hips have degenerated to the point where the council-hired therapist agrees that she needs one. As an intermediary step, she is thinking about taking on a boarder who can care for her while she waits. One of the bedrooms in her two-bedroom home has been stacked to the ceiling with Rose's lifetime of possessions; this has been done to clear the other out so that someone new can move in. Rose herself will make the living room her bedroom, a job that is already half done. A pair of dressers is pushed up against the sealed off fireplace, and two folding wardrobes have been set up on the opposite wall. She already sleeps on a bed in the corner, and her

television sits on the coffee table. She moved into the living room some time ago so that she would not need to navigate the troubling steps when she needs to use the toilet, so giving her bedroom up to a stranger seems like a small sacrifice. Here, Rose seems quite positive about moving a boarder in, but goes on to express feelings of abandonment by the government:

It will be nice having someone around again, actually. I get lonely sometimes, because I can't go out you see. I won't even charge them rent, as long as they buy groceries, help pay the bills. Just help me take care of the place, really, because who knows how long I'll be here? I have to protect myself, because the council certainly isn't protecting me.

Rose expresses in a few words something that many participants discussed at varying lengths: the obligation of the government to provide social housing via the local authority. Many participants felt that they were owed something by their government when it came to housing, because especially for older participants who struggle with mobility, appropriate housing forms a very necessary component of a high-quality life.

This is further demonstrated by the case of William and Alexandra, a married couple in their 60s who share a one-bedroom bungalow in Barnett which they rent from a housing association. Both are classified as disabled; Alexandra is a wheelchair user and William walks with a cane. Until a few years ago, their one bedroom was enough for them. However, as the couple ages, the amount of medical equipment they need to continue living independently has increased significantly. Alexandra now requires a lift to get in and out of bed. William needs a

special chair that can adjust itself via remote control to change position according to his comfort level. They both make use of medical monitoring equipment every day, such as blood pressure monitors, digital scales, and others. A series of machines sits along one wall of their reception room, and as he lists them off, William is careful to point out each piece of equipment and describe its use. When taken together, they take up enough room to prevent them from dedicating much space to personal items, and as they age the machines will continue to multiply. To make the best use of what space they have, they prioritise what they call their most efficient possessions: books and DVDs. What space is not taken up by medical equipment is dedicated to multiple shelves, each full of novels and video media. Despite their efforts however, the home feels “boxed-in” as Alexandra describes it. It was not designed with Alexandra’s powered wheelchair in mind, so the clearance in the hallways is often only inches wider than the chair itself, and the equipment and shelving make it even more difficult for her to manoeuvre. The couple has applied for a larger home, but they have been told that their chances are not good. William is frustrated with the council as a result, which he expresses below:

You know, once upon a time, in a land far, far away... the government was on our side. We got this bungalow from a housing association, but it was built by the local authority. And we used to live in a council house, before moving in here. It used to be so much easier, people were actually willing to help. Now it's the government that wants to take her from me! How things have changed.

Social services have threatened that unless William and Alexandra can secure a more spacious home, they will be forced to remove Alexandra into a care facility because their home is too crowded for Alexandra to live “a decent life.” The two are therefore faced with a difficult decision: they can dispose of more of their personal possessions to satisfy social services, but at this point, will be living with little more than the medical equipment they are already surrounded by. Alternatively, they could seek housing elsewhere, but neither the local authority nor their housing association can offer them the immediate housing they need. Without this housing, their quality of life will be immediately reduced as they are separated. As far as structural violence goes, this would appear to be a prime example; without more appropriate housing, the structures in place to “protect” the couple will forcibly separate them. This is in fact a rather overt example of structural violence. Indeed, in the passage below, William certainly sounds like he has been the victim of violence, with his possessions being repeatedly stripped from him; he also feels now as if he is being made to beg for help:

So we'll give up our things... again. And again and again, for as long as we have to, until we have nothing left. Our home will be a hospital, and then? We'll cross that bridge when we get there, I guess, but I really wasn't expecting this when I went into the council. Back in the day, we were given this house with very little effort. Very little. It only took us a few months to get in, and the way it felt, I don't know... it was like they wanted to help you. Now we feel like tramps, begging for assistance, and everyone saying

there's nothing we can do, but you've got to find a solution. What happened? It used to be so much better. It used to work.

The obligation of government is a phrase heard repeatedly throughout these interviews, particularly from tenants with medical needs. Rose, William and Alexandra each believe that the council owes them a debt of service, to ensure that their lives have a certain quality. All are confident that under previous systems, they would have been cared for, their needs met. The failure of social rented housing and the allocation of social rented housing to meet these basic needs, when once it did, is a primary example of harm and structural violence.

Social Isolation

The third kind of harm observed to arise from social rented housing allocation is social isolation resulting from damage to the relationships between applicants and the people that host them while they seek social rented housing. As discussed in the previous chapter, many participants had elected to live with friends or family while waiting to be allocated a social vacancy. Amongst these, many participants indicated increased stress between this host and their own household. Whilst the majority of such participants were able to maintain a healthy relationship with their hosts, a minority were not able to do so. These participants lost friends and existing relationships with family members as they moved from host to host while waiting to be housed socially. In such cases, many reported social isolation or other stresses resulting from the loss of relationships.

Georgia, a forty-something social housing applicant in Greenwich, requested to meet in a café because she was uncomfortable bringing a stranger to her friend's

home. She speaks at length of the difficulties she has had with friends and family as she moves from place to place, waiting for her social housing application to come through. She says she has “burned through many friends” as a result of her need to “crash.” She has been searching for housing for some years, and often ends her tenure with a friend as a result of a fight. Georgia begins by speaking about the difficulties of living in someone else’s home, and not having one’s own space; she indicates that this has led to fights with friends:

I’ve had fights before, you see. Bad, bad fights. It’s like, I have needs, you know? I need to have space to myself to invite my friends and whoever I want over, but in my experience, it’s best that I don’t. The last place I was staying, well, she was another friend of mine. But we had this huge fight, because I had invited a friend of mine over. We weren’t doing anything really. We had tea. But... my friend, she didn’t like strangers in her home. She said “isn’t it enough that I’m letting you stay here? Why do you have to bring odd people into my home, too?” She got very upset with me, and we fought. Then I wasn’t welcome there anymore, so I had to find somewhere else to stay. And, it wasn’t the first time that something like that had happened.

Not having your own place, you see, well – it puts you at the mercy of other people. Like they can do whatever they want to you, because they’re helping you out. And you have no choice but to take it – well, or leave, I guess. You don’t want to do that, so you just take it.

Georgia has a tumultuous housing history. Asked to leave a house-share in nearby Southwark, she was classified as intentionally homeless because she had technically left of her own accord as opposed to being evicted. An only child whose mother passed away in the 90's, Georgia had no family support. Unable to afford a place of her own or identify another person with which to share a house, she began staying with friends as an interim measure. That was four years ago, and she has since suffered several psychological breakdowns as a result of losing her job and being unable to find secure housing. The combination of circumstances has rendered her a low priority on the social housing waiting list and much too poor to be able to rent or flat-share. Furthermore, the stress that this causes Georgia has worsened her mental state. In the following passage, she confides that she believes herself to be a very difficult person to live with, but that she must ask for assistance from friends because she has no other choice. She indicates here that she "burns friendships" as a result of this need to find housing, and of being a difficult person.

It's like, you do have me in your home. You are doing me a favour, and it's a burden on you. Like right now, I'm staying in this woman's living room. Hell, I'm sleeping on her fold-out couch. I must be such a burden for her... Who wants to come home from a hard day's work, and there I am, in your space? No, I guess I don't blame them for getting tired of it. But what choice do I have? I hate to impose on them, but I have to.

That's why it always ends badly. You know, at the end of the day, I am a burden. I am just dead weight in their house. I don't have a job, so I try to stay busy – try to find a job, or just try to stay

out and about. Like right now. It's better to be out of their house. Because I can see that me being there just stresses my friend out, and I don't want that. I can tell that my welcome is almost up where I am now, and I don't want to push it any more. It's just a shame... living like this burns friendships.

Georgia's case is just one of many that described themselves as being a burden on those with whom she was living. The nature of these burdens might change between individual narratives – in Georgia's case, her lack of family meant she had to stay with friends, who became less willing to house her as time went on. However, amongst participants living with family, the uncertain period which this condition would continue was a source of significant stress. Many participants related fights that they had with parents or siblings over their continued residency in the house, beyond what either party thought was a reasonable amount of time. The continued inability of participants to give an accurate estimate as to when they could expect to alleviate the situation by being allocated a socially rented house was communicated as the cause for many arguments.

In addition to social isolation caused by severed relationships between participants and hosts, it is also worth noting again that amongst participant households whose relationships did not degenerate entirely still usually suffered from increased stress as a result of overcrowding. This was discussed at some length in the previous chapter. A few examples of this already discussed are: Derrick's older brothers, sharing a room in their 30s so that their younger brother can host his daughter every other weekend; Jennifer's father, having his three-bedroom home crowded by the cohabitation of three, sometimes four generations;

and Aaron, living with his wife, two children, brother, his brother's girlfriend, and parents in his childhood three-bedroom home in East London. Each of the cases above, and many others, expressed an increase in stress resulting from overcrowding that was harmful, but did not result in social isolation. In the cases described above, however, this overcrowding – particularly for an extended and uncertain time – led to the degeneration of relationships and social isolation in those interviewed.

Self-Sabotage

Despite the cases of harm caused by the institutions of social housing described above, several patterns of self-sabotage also arose throughout many interviews which likely cannot be categorised as structural violence, but rather, maladaptive strategies taken as a response to structural violence that nonetheless have the individual participant as the initiating actor. Wacquant (2004) discusses this potential failure of structural violence to encompass all aspects of individual narrative, because of what he believes to be an overemphasis on systemic causes for problems. Rather than focusing on systemic or structural violence as the cause for problems, Wacquant prefers a broader approach that can better capture all aspects of individual narrative. Though it does indeed appear to be the case that systems of social rented housing allocation are causing harm to the participants interviewed for this research, it is also clear that these individuals were also harming themselves by pursuing counter-productive housing strategies; these instances did indeed not have a systemic cause, and so as Wacquant argues,

structural violence was not well suited to understanding these aspects of the narrative.

Most significantly, applicants tended to have very little knowledge about the social rented housing allocation systems they were applying for. This tended to both reduce the effectiveness of their applications and cause them to make poor decisions based on their misunderstandings. In other cases, participants might be well aware of the rules of social housing allocation, but persist with a difficult application because they wanted to live in a particular area. In still other cases, participants were simply over-optimistic about their application to social housing; despite having been clearly informed by a housing officer that their wait would be long, they simply believed it would not. Each of these individual failures will be discussed below.

Together, these examples of self-sabotage represent something of a counter-point to the structural violence perspective: it is possible that, though people are victimised by systems, they also victimise themselves. It is important to acknowledge such examples when they occur, and to explore them.

Self-Sabotage or Preference?

Many of the examples below, rather than be interpreted as self-sabotage or self-harm, could be interpreted as preference towards alternate choices or survival strategies. For example, the choice to emphasise remaining in a geographical locale to maintain access to support networks and place familiarity, rather than move to another area of London or even leave London entirely, to more easily access social rented housing; perhaps access to these resources is more important to that

person, and leads to a higher quality of life for them than moving to social housing far away from friends and family would do. Or, the choice to remain optimistic in the face of diminishing odds; it may not be a good strategy for gaining social rented housing, but perhaps it allows the person to maintain a positive outlook, itself a desirable end particularly given the dire circumstances some participants were observed to be living in. These choices are valid for the participants of this research, and it is not the goal of this thesis to cast blame on participants of this research for not making the “right choices” to gain access to social housing. Rather, for the purposes of this research, this section seeks to highlight the role of these alternative choices as maladaptive if the goal of the participant is to gain access to social rented housing. The troubling nature of these choices is not that they are “mistakes,” as such, but that many people appear to have made alternative choices without realising that they reduce their chances at gaining social rented housing; they might still be perfectly valid choices that result in a better life for the participant being discussed, but the choices do reduce their chance at successfully gaining a social letting. It is these individual choices that reduce that chance that is being explored here, while recognising that those choices might still be right for that individual.

Unwarranted Optimism

Ella, a 30-something single mother of two school-aged boys in Lambeth, is an excellent example of someone who is more optimistic about their social rented housing application than she likely should be. She explained that the housing association waiting list worked well for her because she did not have the time to bid

under her borough's choice-based letting and that putting her name on the waiting list was enough to guarantee her a home eventually. Her allocation of a home was, in her opinion, inevitable. She held this belief in spite of the council telling her it could be a long time before she was housed. She opens the following passage by indicating that she "doesn't have time" for choice-based lettings, and then goes on to state that the waiting list will work better for her because it requires less involvement:

The thing is, I don't have the time for [choice-based lettings]. Or maybe that's wrong, I guess I do technically have the time for it. But I work two jobs – two jobs! – to afford the rent on this place. I work nights cleaning offices, and then in the day I work at a shop. So if I get any free time at all, which is never, I either want to spend it with my kids, or sleeping. But that's rare. I guess I could spend the time looking at houses on the council's site, but I just don't care to. I might do it, if I had the time, but the simple fact is that I don't. Or maybe it would be better to say, I don't have the right kind of energy for it, at the end of my day, if you know what I mean?

The waiting list that the company has me on, though, that works a lot better for me, because I know I'm just on it. I know, if I spend enough time on that list, eventually they will find me a house, and I don't have to do anything for that to happen. And that works better, you see, because I don't have anything to give to the search at the end of the day. So I prefer that.

When asked, Ella went on to incorrectly describe how a waiting list functions:

Well, you just wait. That's how it works, isn't it? You put your name on the list, and as people get housed, you move up the list until it's your turn. People in emergency situations get priority, but then the rest go on a first come, first served basis. So you put your name down, and then you just wait. Eventually you will get a home. It may take some time, but you will get a home.

Currently residing in a one-bedroom home which she rents in Lambeth, Ella must work two jobs to afford her rent. She views this as a temporary inconvenience because she is confident that if she waits long enough, she will be housed in a socially rented home. In the meantime she lives in the living room of their flat, while her two sons share the bedroom. It is a small space in a newer building, and Ella does not mind giving a quick tour. The home is probably designed for one person given the amount of storage space it has: a single, closet-sized storage cupboard, and one wardrobe in the bedroom. To compensate for the lack of storage, Ella has bought for her boys two large dressers that take up most of the space in the bedroom that isn't already dedicated to their bunk beds, and there is barely enough room for a table in the corner with a small television on it. The bedroom's window is partially blocked by one of the dressers. The living room is similarly crowded, with a pair of pop-up wardrobes and a coat rack taking up a significant amount of space. The dining table is covered in paperwork, homework, and text books, and the open-plan kitchen's diminutive counters are covered in drying pots and other dishes. The only clear surface in the room is the sofa-bed,

which has been folded up into a couch which Ella is seated upon. She has lived here for nearly two years already, and has been on the waiting list with the housing association for that entire time. Here, she describes her living condition as crowded, but indicates that she is unwilling to leave the area to find more spacious accommodation. She also indicates a belief that the housing association will find a space for her, though she says they cannot tell her when:

Yes, it's crowded. But it's worth it. We could move to somewhere more roomy, I guess, but the truth is I just couldn't afford it. We would have to leave the area... probably out to Zone 4 or something extreme like that, and I don't want to shift my children from their school now and anyway, that would just make my commute longer. I'm satisfied to wait until they get to me; when they do, it will have been worth it.

I have called them a few times – the association, that is – to ask how much longer, but they can't tell me exactly how long it will be. They say it could be a long wait, but they can't be sure. But I'm sure it won't be that long. We've already been on for two years. The housing association says I should be applying at the local authority, bidding on houses and all of that, but I'd rather not. We're okay for now, and I'm just too knackered at the end of the day to deal with any of that.

Behaviour like Ella's was quite common amongst participants. Many expressed a high level of confidence in their eventually being housed, despite clear reticence on the part of the council or housing association about their ability to

house them in short order. On the one hand, participants were often able to recommunicate the hesitation of housing organisations in housing them, yet they did not seem to believe these hesitations. Instead, they expressed an optimism that was sometimes in stark contrast to the information provided to them. Some individuals were told in no uncertain terms that they would not be housed before five years had passed, at the least – and that even then, housing was far from guaranteed. Despite this, participants like Ella continued to live in less than ideal conditions on the optimistic assumption that they would be housed in a shorter time frame than the one suggested to them.

Jonas, another 30-something this time living in Waltham Forest, expressed similar sentiments about his family's application to a housing association. Like Ella, he admits that waiting times have gotten longer, but also expresses a belief that he "must be getting close" to getting housed:

Sure, things may have gotten worse. I know the waiting times now are longer than they used to be. But the list still works the same as it always has, obviously. You put your name down, and then the council – or, well, the housing association – they call you back when they've found a place for you. Then you move in. It may take awhile, a few years someone told me once, but they will find a place for you if you give them the time.

I'm happy to wait, you know? I could go on and use the bidding system at the local authority, but if one of these housing associations can get me a place without me doing anything – well, that's better then, isn't it? I mean, I've used the bidding system. I

won't be getting anywhere anytime soon using that, there's too many people on it. But I've been on the waiting list for a few years now. I must be getting to the close of the top, right?

Jonas, like Ella, lives with his family in a small home. His son and daughter, both below school-age, share a bedroom, while he and his wife have a second bedroom to themselves. They rent their semi-detached house privately, but the cost is high. Both him and his wife must remain fully employed to continue paying the rent, and they are unable to save any money. They are struggling financially, but continue to rent where they are in the hope that they will soon be allocated a rented social home by the housing association. In the passage below, Jonas describes the requirements to making their living situation work – a mother-in-law babysitter, and both parents must be employed – but also believes it will be worth it in the end:

If it wasn't for my mother-in-law watching the kids during the day, we wouldn't be able to do this. She doesn't mind, fortunately; she likes spending time with the kids. But you know, we hardly spend any time with them. I'm on my feet all day at the shop, when I get home and I just want to collapse. And it's the same for my wife. She works in a dentist's surgery, and has to put up with snotty kids all day. So at the end of it all, we just kind of fall down. Really, I wish we could spend more quality time as a family, but we can't do that and continue living here.

The wait will be worth it, though. I've seen some of the places you can get on that bidding system – they're nice, and the

prices! It's enough to make you cry. We could afford to cut back on our hours if our rent wasn't so high. Spend more time together.

Jonas, like Ella, believes that “the wait for social housing will be worth it.”

Both Jonas and Ella fail to understand that the nature of social housing has changed significantly. Where once waiting was a successful strategy, it no longer is so.

Unique to cases like Jonas and Ella, however, is the information provided to them by housing organisations. Both of these households have been informed in no uncertain terms that they will not be housed soon, or at all, given their current circumstances; yet both households continue to believe that they will. Because of this belief, they maintain housing that is not healthy for them or their children, pursuing a strategy that will not work. Neither household has grounds for preferential treatment in the social housing allocation system; waiting, therefore, will not be an effective strategy. They have been informed of this, yet they continue to pursue it.

Geographical Preference

Other households choose to remain housed in non-ideal circumstances out of a geographical preference strong enough to override other concerns such as overcrowding, high rent, or poor living conditions.

Allen sits in a high-backed chair, his walking stick leaning against the wall next to him. Piles of paperwork spread across the couch, stacked books lean haphazardly in the corner, and a neat pile of folded laundry rests on the table in the centre of the room. He has had to continue sharing a housing association flat with his ex-partner for six years after they split up, and their one-bedroom home is

obviously filled to capacity with the possessions of two “very much separate” households. Allen has been registered on his local authority’s choice-based lettings scheme since the breakup, and diligently searches for and bids on properties every week – for six years. His prospects, however, are not good. He discusses how long he has been waiting, and how his odds remain low, here:

With the bidding system, if you’re like me and you haven’t got a lot of points, you’re bidding but you know you’re not going to get it. There’s not really hope. They say I could still get a flat with my points but... there’s no hope, really. I look every week. I go online to see what’s there. It takes me about twenty minutes, and I put quite a few bids in, but there are just so many people bidding. In six years, the best I’ve done is 20th or 30th out of about 70 people.

When asked with whom he has applied for housing, Allen indicates that he primarily works through Islington’s bidding system, but that he is registered on a few waiting lists with housing associations, as well. When asked about the possibility of applying to housing in another borough, he is dismissive, as can be seen below; this response was not uncommon amongst participants. Allen discusses why he doesn’t want to move away from Islington, an understandable decision given the alternative resources he has access to here.

Nah, nah... it’s Islington for me. I’m from around here, this is my part of town. I might consider moving to Hackney, maybe... or Camden. But, not further than that. My friends are here, I know the shops here. This is where all of my support is, if you know what I

mean. I grew up just down the road! Leaving would mean starting all over – new place, new people. I just wouldn't want to do that. I couldn't imagine doing it.

But you know, applying in Hackney and Camden, that might not be a bad idea. I might just have to look into doing that, it hadn't occurred to me to be honest. I guess I wouldn't mind living there, it would still be a pretty close trip to come and see people and I know them well enough – know where things are, and so on. I think I'll look into that, I will do.

Expanding the frame of reference, Allen indicates that he would not consider leaving London despite the difficulty of the housing market here and the relative ease of finding social housing outside of the city:

No, I could never leave London! It's like, this is where I'm from, even more so than Islington. I definitely would not want to live somewhere else. That has never even occurred to me. I mean, there's everything here. This is where the work is. This is where the... services are. Like, medical, you know? There's just an atmosphere here that isn't there in other places. Maybe it's... you know, the diversity. Languages, and foods... No I wouldn't want to leave. Hard to say why, exactly. There's just something about it.

Many individuals communicated geographical preferences similar to what Allen has expressed above. People expressed strong regional identities and did not wish to leave the bounds of what they considered “their home,” usually defined by borough, and were completely unwilling to leave London itself.

One participant who did not want to provide additional details about her social housing application described her connection to her place of residence as only part of why she did not want to leave; she also cited the resources that were available to her as a result of family and friends in the area as important for her quality of life, and for the quality of life for her children. These sentiments were echoed by many other participants, who likewise were not willing to look outside of their own borough. Below, she gives significant detail to the resources available to her by remaining where she is:

It's like this. I have family here... I have friends here. That means more than just emotional stuff, okay? I'm not just being sentimental. They are resources for me. My friends from school, they watch my kids when I go to work. I do laundry at my mom's house. I know all the schools around here, and a lot of the teachers. I trust them, and they know me. I know where my kids can go, and where they shouldn't go. It's about security, and it's about resources. I wouldn't have any of that if I went across town, and especially if I left London altogether. I would be alone, and I don't know if I could raise two kids by myself, without any support.

But to be honest, I haven't really thought about it. I just haven't really... thought about it. Maybe, like up North or something, I could find a little job, and be able to pay rent on a better place. Or, maybe the waiting list is shorter and I could get into a council house more easily. Then, I guess I might not need

people's help, I might be able to do it on my own... if things were cheaper, and so on. I don't know. I haven't thought about it.

It is this failure to consider the option of moving across town, or leaving London, that is maladaptive. Broadly speaking, the majority of participants had indeed not considered the option of leaving London altogether. Many participants were employed in low-skill, low-wage jobs that do exist outside of London and might provide a more significant real income in a housing market less competitive than that present in London and the Southeast. However, the majority had not even weighed this option.

Giving Up

Finally, some participants expressed such frustration with the systems of social housing allocation that they literally gave up on using them. Although this behaviour, too, is understandable given the difficulty of successfully acquiring a social tenancy, the decision to simply stop working within the system is obviously unlikely to lead to a positive result.

Eunice, a short, Caribbean woman sitting on an overstuffed, re-upholstered couch spoke at some length about the despair she feels, and how this has caused her to basically give up on her application for social rented housing:

I just don't know when it's going to get better. It's been two years since I moved back to England, and I've been living with family all that time. But it's beginning to be too much, as the kid's grow. There's two families living in this house, and I just don't know when it's going to get better. I try not to think about it, because

there's nothing I can do and it really upsets me, but I can't help it.

This can only last for so long.

Eunice lives with her school-aged son and daughter in her cousin's apartment, on the 19th floor of an ageing council block flat that was transferred to a housing association twenty years ago. The intercom at the front of the building does not function, the halls are dark, and chipped concrete and a puddle of urine gives the lift a pungent smell. The flat itself is neat and clean, in stark contrast to the building's interior infrastructure. Eunice's cousin has two small children as well, and the single-parent families struggle to keep the space neat, so that both families can coexist in the two-bedroom home. But it is crowded, even if organised. From the passage below, it is clear that Eunice is becoming exasperated with her situation:

This isn't where I wanted to raise my children, and the longer we have to stay here – I'm going out of my mind. How long can I ask my cousin to put up with us? Another five years? I'm working two jobs, seven days a week to save enough money to move into a place of our own, but that won't be sustainable.

Eunice has been classed as purposefully homeless, because she surrendered a council house seven years ago to take a job opportunity abroad before moving back to the United Kingdom two years ago. Now that she has returned, her purposefully homeless status means she is near the bottom of the priority list, despite the overcrowding in her home. She can bid on her borough's choice-based letting scheme, but she has yet to place higher than 50th. Here, she indicates a desire simply to know when she was going to be housed:

I just wish I knew when we were going to be housed. I bid and I bid and I bid, but nothing ever happens. Eventually it got to the point where it was just depressing me, seeing all of these houses that I knew I was never going to get, so I just stopped. That was about a year ago. I don't even go on anymore.

Her withdrawal is far from uncommon, but participants expressed a range of emotions when giving up on social housing. Eunice, above, seems defeated. Willis, below, is angry. He is a single older man applying from Camden, and in this passage, he makes clear that he does not believe he will be housed and that this is upsetting. He goes on to describe the process of applying for a home, before indicating it is a waste of time:

What's the point of bidding? I gave up on that a long time ago. Why even let me bid, when it's going to be five years until I have a shot? There's no point in that, so screw it. I don't really know what to do in the meantime, but I know that's not going to work for me.

I'll tell you how it works. I go on to the bidding system every week, and I look at places that all seem great and fit my needs just fine. One-bedroom places, third floor, whatever. I don't need anything amazing. So I bid. And every time I don't make it, and I'm so far from making it. Like, placing over 100. What's the point? What's the bloody point of trying? There is no point, so I gave up.

It's like, if you don't want me to apply, then don't let me try! Don't like, get my hopes up, you know? Just tell me "no, sorry,

there's no place for you." Don't waste my time, having to figure that out for myself.

Given the difficulty of acquiring a social tenancy under current guidelines, and the apparent resistance offered by housing organisations in providing helpful guidance to applicants, the decision to give up on social housing is perhaps understandable. However, surrendering still represents a failure on the part of the applicant. Other applicants, when faced with resistance from social housing organisations, chose to further educate themselves about the functioning of social housing in the UK and to carefully examine all of the options available to them to formulate new, more successful strategies. Some of these more successful cases will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

The Outcome of Using Structural Violence

Although the origin of structural violence is in studies on developing countries to explore how large-scale factors such as colonisation and globalisation have led to individual narratives of harm that are perpetuated by institutions, not individuals, this research has attempted to follow another path. Other authors have applied structural violence to the developed world, and in following in those footsteps this study has confirmed that this is indeed a worthwhile approach, particularly for examining the effect of policy change on individuals. Structural violence was the strongest methodological influence on this work, and I hope this has shown through in the attention given to individual narrative as directly communicated by participants. Although structural violence, as a theoretical lens, has been less apt for investigating instances where applicants made apparently sub-

optimal choices (in the context of their applications to social rented housing), the structural violence approach has been very effective for evoking the experience of the individual and connecting that experience to the wider forces that can carry out violence on the individual. Using qualitative interviews describing experience, structural violence seeks to have an effect on the reader, and I believe this approach has been successful as will continue to be demonstrated in subsequent chapters with other participants' narratives. Where structural violence has struggled somewhat is on the actual operationalisation of violence at the level of the institution, which connects macro-scale forces to the individual. It is my hope that in the following chapter, a public administration interpretation of participant narrative has helped to examine the operations of social housing organisations.

Conclusion of Chapter 4: Institutional Harm and Self-Sabotage

In conclusion, it appears that structural violence has taken place against non-emergency, social rented housing applicants. This is similar to the structural violence described in the literature review of this thesis: in denying people who might earlier have had access to social rented housing, their ability to meet their own needs has been threatened. This aligns well with Galtung's (1985) definition of structural violence as a systemic actor reducing a vulnerable population's ability to provide for themselves. Furthermore, it aligns with Farmer's argument that though such violence may take place and the cause for it can be traced to geographical and historical context, the individuals experiencing this violence are often unable to trace the cause or explanation for the violence in the first place; this lack of awareness has been observed in participants to this research, who were broadly

unaware of why their social rented housing applications continued to fail when, in their minds, they were perfect candidates to be housed socially.

Prior to the 1980s, such applicants would have had predictable access to social housing that was relatively prompt, compared to today's waiting time. The first and most significant source of harm to participants was therefore the uncertain nature of the waiting time which they now experience. For the most part, social housing organisations were unable to tell participants when they would be housed, and this caused significant distress and poor decision-making amongst them. Second, social housing allocation policies failed to re-house certain elderly applicants who self-identified as being in need of new housing. Third, long and ambiguous waiting times damaged the relationships between several participants and the households hosting them, leaving several participating households in a state of social isolation. These three problems of unexpected waiting time, failed elderly transfers, and social isolation were caused by problems with the social housing allocation system.

Not all harm being experienced by participants of this research has had a structural origin, however. As is often the case, individuals cause problems for themselves in a variety of ways in addition to the problems imposed on them by the systems with which they interact. In the case of housing, applicants interviewed for this research frequently made assumptions about their anticipated waiting time, in lieu of or in direct contradiction to information provided by housing organisations. Assumptions were almost invariably too optimistic, and then informed counter-productive housing strategies involving continued residence in overcrowded or economically unsustainable situations. Others acknowledged that

waiting times were indeed likely to be very long, but refused to consider other housing options because of a strong geographic preference that overrode other housing needs. Other participants, exhausted by the difficulties they have faced in seeking social housing, simply quit the process rather than engaging with it in a more proactive manner. Optimistic delusion, geographic preference, and outright disengagement are poor strategies for long-term housing success, and represent failures on the individual level that in some cases equalled or exceeded failures of the institution.

Wacquant (2004) discusses this potential failure of structural violence to completely engage with every element of an individual's actions. Indeed, I would agree that structural violence as a holistic approach is not well-suited to examining the responses of participants of this research to the structural violence that they experience. Many participants chose to pursue frankly poor strategies in response to their continued failure, and it was not apparent that these poor choices were the result of systemic problems. The case of Jonathon, who was very effective in pursuing a successful housing strategy despite facing significant challenges, highlights the importance of individual initiative in the current social housing climate. Structural violence does not function particularly well in explaining the difference between Jonathon and another participant, who failed to show such initiative, because it deals primarily with systemic causes for the problems of individuals. Though this has indeed been useful for exploring the historical cause of participants' expectations for social housing, which participants themselves had difficulty communicating, it is not useful for explaining failures not of the system, but of the individual. When applying a structural violence approach, it is therefore

important to interrogate participant share in problem-making. In the cases discussed above, participants clearly harmed their own outcomes by being too optimistic, by emphasising too much a preference for their native boroughs, and by giving up on the social housing allocation process rather than engaging more fully in it. In subsequent chapters, this thesis will also describe successful strategies undertaken by individuals, in contravention of the institutional harms described in the opening section of this chapter. In short, this thesis recognises that although structural violence is useful throughout most of this thesis for examining the institutional harm done to individuals, the role the individual plays in this process is also significant.

Examining the characteristics of individual applicants which make them successful is indeed a useful supplement to the institutional examination taking place in this chapter, and will be conducted in Chapter 7. Chapter 6, however, will first continue the institutional analysis taking place in this chapter by examining the actual operationalisation of social rented housing allocation as experienced by participants of this research.

Chapter 5:

Rationalisation

The purpose of this chapter is to answer the research question: “what are the positive and negative aspects of rationalisation experienced by applicants to UK social rented housing today?” Public administration, and the Weberian study of bureaucracy from which much of public administration arises, gives considerable thought to the rationalisation of the human experience. Bureaucracies seek to quantify and rationalise human experience to facilitate just and beneficial application of societal resources by way of governance. Ideally, public institutions pursue impartiality and efficiency as methods to best distribute communal goods to best effect; this aligns with Weber’s (1978) definition of formal rationality as the purposeful calculation of the most efficient means and procedures to realise goals.

Social housing is no different in this respect. By quantifying the need for housing using a variety of mechanisms, social housing organisations seek to ration it to the people that need it most. This is an admirable goal. However, in the quest for rational impartiality, it is possible to over-rationalise the human experience into an unrecognisable form, replacing human experiences with numbers, measurements, and detached processes operating in isolation from the humanity which social services are meant to serve. When this happens, it harms both those being served by public institutions as well as the bureaucrats serving within them by dehumanising both parties. The applicant’s unique circumstances are distilled into a series of numbers that do not tell their story, and the bureaucrat becomes nothing more than a needs-calculator. Both are trapped in what Weber calls the

“iron cage.” Though rationalisation is an important tool in the toolbox of the public institution, it is a double-edged sword that must be wielded carefully.

When the availability of resources within institutions for public assistance dwindle – as has occurred in UK social housing – the role of rationing becomes more pronounced and the tendency towards dehumanisation of both the applicant and the bureaucrat increases. This chapter seeks to identify the positive and negative aspects of rationalisation, as experienced by participating applicants to social housing. The results of this research are mixed: most applicants reported some positive and some negative aspects of interacting with rationalised social housing processes. Positive elements of participant narratives included transparency, objectivity, and internal organisational consistency. Negative aspects focused on a perceived disconnect between participants’ circumstances and the points-based assessment of their housing need, as well as a lack of consistency between different housing organisations applicants had applied to. Participants also expressed feelings of dehumanisation, and communicated that housing organisations had put themselves before their clients in implementing choice-based lettings, because it is easier to administrate. Many participants felt that working in choice-based lettings was a waste of their time.

Broadly speaking, then, participants experienced both positive and negative aspects of rationalisation in their social housing applications. They did feel protected by rationalisation in some ways; but in other ways, they felt dehumanised by those same processes. These themes will be discussed below first by speaking to the benefits of rationalisation, and then by speaking to the detriments of it. It is important to note that the themes of objectivity, transparency,

and consistency discussed here did not arise directly from a “Weberian” reading of the interviews, except that public administration literature helped inform the questions that were asked; rather, the themes discussed here arose from iterative coding of participant narratives, which took place independent of any consultation of the literatures discussed in this thesis.

Benefits of Rationalisation

Weber defined rationalisation as the move away from charismatic authority, which operated government through traditions, emotion and personality, towards a rational-legal authority, which operates government through quantifiable best practices aimed at achieving a just distribution of collective goods and services. In short, rational authority seeks to remove individual factors from decision-making processes, standardising them in accordance with collectively agreed upon norms that are democratically moderated. Three of the most effective tools of the rational institution are objectivity, consistency, and transparency, each of which formed a significant thread within the narratives of participants of this research. The reflection of these themes by participant narrative, discussed initially in the literature of chapter 2, speaks strongly for the relevance of those works, particularly in the foundational work of Weber in considering the benefits of bureaucracy.

Objectivity

Objectivity is an organisation’s equal treatment of individuals regardless of qualities that differentiate them, unless those qualities are explicitly part of the agreed upon norms of how that organisation operates (Weber 1978). For example,

an objective housing organisation would not take gender, ethnicity, or education level into account when deciding whether to allocate a home to someone. Broadly speaking, housing organisations are expected to treat people of different backgrounds in a similar manner, if those backgrounds are not relevant to their housing needs. Other factors which are relevant to housing need can be considered. Amongst these are income, current housing circumstances, and histories of anti-social behaviour. Housing organisations are therefore allowed to take these factors into account when deciding whom to house. The central government defines what factors housing organisations may or may not consider.

Participant narratives told three repeated stories with respect to the objectivity of social housing organisations. First, most participants trusted the objectivity of the local authority over the objectivity of housing associations. Second, some participants seriously questioned the objectivity of housing association staff because of personal problems they had with the staff; meanwhile, third and in contrast to the previous points, others had significant trust in housing association staff, usually because of positive experiences with them. When there was a difference in how participants viewed the objectivity of the local authority versus that of the housing association, it was often the result of differences between how choice-based lettings work compared to waiting lists, which are employed by local authorities and housing associations respectively. When dealing with individual housing officers, the nature of that relationship had a noticeable effect on how the participant viewed the objectivity of the organisation for which the officer worked.

Many participants did not feel discriminated against by the local authority because of non-relevant information, though recent histories of segregation do still play a role in many narratives. Furthermore, this was broadly divided between experiences with the local authority, by whom participants did not feel discriminated against, and experiences with housing associations, by whom participants were more likely to feel discriminated against. "It would be hard for [the council] to discriminate against me," begins Kendra, a 30-something woman of Caribbean descent who lives in a one-bedroom, New Cross flat with her son and nephew. She rents privately, at what she describes a significant cost, but is confident that she will be housed "within a reasonable amount of time." She is applying for housing with both the local authority and several housing associations, and like other participants, has more confidence in the local government than the independent organisation. She expresses this confidence in the passage below; even though she does not think they are housing as many people as they used to, she does not believe they are allocating based on favouritism. She even expresses confidence as a result of the rational measurement of need.

My mother, she rented a council flat for years. Still does, not far from here actually. There's no room for me there, but, you know, back in the 70's, when she got the place, you know they used to put everyone together? That's right... it still shows, too. The whole place is full of other Afro-Caribbeans. Smells like home, if you know what I mean, but that was segregation, you know? All of my friends were black growing up. It wasn't until I went to uni that I met people from outside of my tribe.

I don't think they would be able to do that, now. I'm in control of my own application – I choose where I apply for housing, where I bid for, and the person with the most points, well, they just get it. And you don't get any points for the colour of your skin. I think that's an improvement, a real improvement. Instead of someone deciding where you go, it's all down to the numbers, and where you pick. So there's really no room for putting these people here, and those people there. No, I don't think they could do that, and that's good.

I know, when we get in somewhere, my son will mix with other people. He'll make friends from other groups, and that's a good thing.

Kendra's home is impeccably clean. She has hung her bachelor's degree on the wall, amidst a variety of awards from her son and nephew, whom she cares for as her older sister is ill. The one-bedroom home is crowded, but organised. Kendra sleeps in the living room, on a fold out couch which she hides away during the visit, whilst the two preteen boys share the more spacious bedroom. The separate kitchen is somewhat less neat. Homework and schoolbooks cover the dining table, which serves as the one workspace in the apartment. Kendra apologises for the cramped quarters, but expresses pride in her ability to keep it well-ordered regardless. She goes on to compare her application, by choice-based letting, to her application on the waiting list at a housing association. She expresses a greater distrust of the housing association than the local authority, because the association

does not allocate on a points-based system. She says this makes her feel more vulnerable to discrimination.

Now, the housing association – I'm not so sure about them.

I'm on one of their waiting lists – two, actually, for different estates.

I've spoken with the woman who put me on, and she seems nice

enough. I trust her. But... that's the thing, you see? I have to trust

her. If she didn't like me, or the colour of my skin, she could just

**clap* put our application at the bottom of the pile, and there's*

nothing I could do about it. So I do feel more vulnerable there, even

though, no, I don't think the housing officer would do that. But I do

feel vulnerable. Like, she could do, if she wanted, I'm sure.

Though most participants agreed with Kendra that local authorities were unlikely to practice discrimination, several other participants did express fears about discrimination by housing associations. Objectivity when expressed as a trait of housing organisations was positive, however, participants did not always express that housing organisations were objective, and this was particularly true for housing associations. Housing associations in many boroughs are not required to list their properties on local authority choice-based lettings schemes. Instead, their waiting lists continue to be run by individual housing administrators, who continue to have wide latitude in choosing whom to house and where to house them. These conditions could potentially allow similar discrimination and segregation as was researched in the 1980s and 90s in local authority housing (Mullins and Murie 2006), particularly in a context of street level bureaucracy as discussed in the literature review (see Lipsky 2010 and Alden 2015). It seemed that several instances

of street level bureaucrat activity were likely being practiced, given the widely divergent experiences participants had with housing organisation staff.

Unlike Kendra, who has had positive interactions with her housing association officer, other participants were convinced not only that discrimination could happen, but that it was happening to them. This is problematic, because discrimination is the ultimate perversion of the rational decision-making sought by modern institutions of public authority.

Alec is a home seeker in Barnet, and has applied to several local housing associations in addition to the local authority's CBL scheme in his attempt to gain a social tenancy. In dealing with one particular housing administrator, he has felt discriminated against not because of ethnicity, gender, or anything else more stereotypically associated with discrimination – but because of his personality. He expresses this concern below:

She says they're not housing me because there are no places available, and when a place does come available, she can't guarantee that I'll be the person who needs it most. But you know what I think? I think she doesn't like me. I think she thinks that I'm a troublemaker, so she's shutting me out in favour of someone a little quieter. But that's not fair, is it?

Except for instances of anti-social behaviour, personality is not relevant to housing need. However, housing associations which manage their own waiting list often rely on the individual judgement of staff to judge between several applicants whom to house. In such cases, it is sometimes the case that personality conflicts can affect whether someone is housed or not. This is what Alec fears is occurring to

him; that because the housing officer of this association has taken a dislike to his personality, he will not be housed. This links directly to one of Weber's primary requisites for effective bureaucracy: the impersonal nature of relationships between bureaucrats and the public they serve. Here, Alec summarises how he had an argument with an association staff person about wanting to be informed of his place on the waiting list:

I'll tell you what happened. I've been on this waiting list for three years now, and they send me another letter every six months to check up on me, to see if my situation has changed... if I still want to be on the list. Well, my situation isn't changing any time soon, but you have to write them to let them know that yes, you still want to stay on. Well, it irritated me one day, getting another one of these letters oh... about a year back. So I phoned up, and demanded to know when it was going to be, how much longer. To be honest with you, I might have been a little rude, which I shouldn't have been. But I deserve to know something, am I right? Anyway, we had some words which I won't repeat, and since then, I think they've flagged my file. I can't know, of course, but I can tell she doesn't want me to have to handle, so now I'm on the out.

It isn't fair. I get that I was rude, but I've apologised, and the fact that I was rude doesn't mean I won't be a good tenant, or that I don't need a home. I still need home. It isn't fair.

Other participants assumed that the housing officers of the housing association to which they were applying were not interested, but neutral parties

with little effect on the decision made. The validity of this belief will likely vary between housing associations, each of which can employ varying means of allocating housing. Still, it is interesting to note the level of trust that some applicants had for employees of housing associations. Take Mary, for example, an older woman seeking to downsize out of her three-bedroom, Southwark home. In the passage below, she expresses trust towards the staff at the housing association, because she does not believe there is anything the individual she interacts with can do to make her application more or less likely to be housed:

You know, it's just a matter of waiting. I get along with the people at the association, I do, but I don't think that matters. Even if I didn't, it would be down to two things: how much I need a house, and how long I've been waiting. I don't really need a house, you see – I already have this great big one I'm not using, so I'm just fine. It's really to their benefit to downsize me, isn't it? But there isn't enough one beds to go around, I guess, for people like me to get into. Anyway, if I wait long enough, they will eventually have to give me the next place available, so it's only a matter of time. As much as I like [the housing manager], there's nothing she can do to speed up or slow down my application. I'll get in when I get in, and I'll just have to wait until I do.

Alec's concern with housing managers of association waiting lists, Mary's lack thereof, and Kendra's confidence in local authority-endorsed choice-based lettings schemes' inability to discriminate are each representative of a different, yet common perspective on housing organisation objectivity. People frequently felt

that their housing administrator either liked or disliked them, and felt that this would have a bearing on their application, which per central government guidance it should not. Other applicants, however, indicated that this was not a concern. Choice-based lettings systems, meanwhile, seemed to be preferable for many applicants because they appeared to be more rational, and thus protective of people fearful of discrimination. This raised an interesting dichotomy in narrated experience, sometimes establishing a conflict within individual narratives. On the one hand, most participants seemed to prefer the waiting list as implemented by housing associations because they felt they received more individualised attention through the waiting list. However, when speaking about objectivity within social housing, participants often expressed a preference for choice-based lettings precisely because of the rational detachment it offers from conditions that are not relevant to a person's housing need. When participants expressed feelings of vulnerability to the institutions of social housing, they were more likely to prefer choice-based lettings because of the more rational, detached mechanisms that offered protection from discrimination.

Consistency

Consistency refers to the ability to reproduce similar results given similar circumstances. Consistency is one of the foundations of the bureaucracy, as envisaged by Weber and as built on by public administration, because it is the rational application of criteria, cause and effect that allows a bureaucracy to be both fair and reliable as a public service. Consistency is one of the defining characteristics of a bureaucracy.

In social housing, consistency can be taken to mean two things: first, that an individual housing organisation will treat people in a predictable and repeatable manner; second, that between different housing organisations, outcomes are similarly repeatable. Broadly speaking, participants reported relatively consistent outcomes in their dealings with organisations with which they were applying to social housing, which is positive. Interviewees expressed that they were confident in the outcomes of housing queries based on previous interactions with organisation staff. However, when asked about consistency between different organisations, many reported that results could vary significantly. This indicates that although housing organisations are internally consistent within their own operating procedures, each operates differently and produces different outcomes for different applicants depending on where they apply. This presented a significant challenge for many participants, who had to learn the different application procedures for the many different local authorities and housing associations to which they applied.

Jonathon explains the importance of educating yourself about the different allocation and selection policies, and how much work this represents. He is a single father of a two-year old daughter, and lives in a former council flat in Camden which has been purchased by a private development agency. The building is a cement tower block, foreboding and isolated from local shops by single family, suburban homes arranged in layers of cul-de-sacs around the estate. He has only lived here for six months. Technically, it is classed as temporary accommodation and has been rented by the council to house Jonathon and his daughter until a more permanent housing solution can be found. The flat is a peculiar contradiction.

Jonathon says that the entire block has been slated for demolition, and indeed it is clearly run down. The concrete exterior walls are chipped, the door intercom and camera do not function, and the lift has an out of order sign on it though it does function. The landscaping surrounding the building is in a poor state. Clearly, the building and grounds are not being maintained adequately. However, the interior of Jonathon's flat is like new. It has been re-carpeted recently, re-plastered, repainted and outfitted at the expense of the council with brand new furniture and utilities. But Jonathon and his daughter have very few personal possessions. It feels like they've moved into a hotel, and what personal effects they do have – a playpen, a baby-swing – lend the home a melancholy air, which Jonathon also expresses below

It doesn't feel like a home, does it? That's because it's not.

We haven't really moved in here, haven't unpacked the bags. The thing is, it's just "temporary accommodation," so we're kind of stuck waiting. They could move us at any time, so I don't want to get too comfortable. But I have no idea how long it could be, so I have to stay on top of things.

He pulls out a pair of thick, ringed binders full of hole-punched paperwork, neatly categorised behind a variety of tabs. The binders are meticulously organised, and he refers to them throughout the following passage to demonstrate his knowledge of the social rented housing application process, and his current stage within that process:

These are my housing applications, their statuses and any relevant policy guidance to them, for each of the housing associations or local authorities I'm applying with. And this, this is

the government legislation, at both the central and local authority level, that has any bearing on my... many cases.

You see, this is my routine. Each month, I start by calling up all of the housing associations that still use waiting lists, and ask them if they have any vacancies that we might have a chance at getting into. The answer is always the same: never a flat no, but never a yes. But I'm getting to know people, and I think that's important, because I think they'll be more likely to house us. Then I make an appointment with the council people, to discuss my case and see if they can move us into permanent housing. Then each week I bid on properties on the CBL scheme. I bother them a lot, because I know my rights. They have to find us actual housing, and I am going to make sure they fulfil that obligation. I also keep up on policy change and any new laws or anything like that gets passed, so I can be prepared if something happens, or I can use it to my advantage, maybe. They treat you differently when you make it clear you know what you're doing.

So I keep on it. It might seem like a lot of work, and it is. Every place has a different set of rules, and you have to know them all. But let me tell you – if I hadn't been willing to do this, we wouldn't be here now. We would still be living with my mother, on the other side of the borough, and this is so much better.

Jonathon shares that, though he was housed in his mother's home, he did not view the home as sufficient for him or his daughter due to overcrowding.

Though he registered on the local authority's choice-based lettings scheme, it was taking too long to be rehoused. That was when he started his research, culminating in two binders' worth of policy knowledge on his and surrounding boroughs and every housing association within them. Eventually he discovered that if he were homeless, the council would be required to house him. He therefore had his mother evict him, placing an obligation on the local authority to find him and his daughter temporary accommodation. They ended up in this somewhat dilapidated building; the council "put a fresh coat of paint on," and moved them in. Here, Jonathon indicates that this is only possible with the local authority, but also indicates that getting this done requires a lot of work and expertise:

But you know, this would never have worked with a housing association. I mean, first of all, they're all different, but they don't do emergency housing like that unless it's at the request of the council, and even then, only in certain boroughs. But they have other ways of working. Most of them do register their homes on the CBL scheme, but many still use waiting lists. It's all so different, keeping up with them all is like a full-time job. It takes a lot of time. But it's what you've got to do.

Jonathon was the most extreme example of an interviewee learning what is necessary to make the most effective social housing application possible, and he is certainly the exception that proves the rule. He has put hundreds of hours of work into understanding the policies of a dozen different organisations so that he can maximise his odds of getting a permanent social tenancy as soon as possible.

This burdensome requirement is a direct result of the lack of consistency between both local authority housing schemes and other housing organisations. On the one hand, the consistency shown within the organisations which Jonathon and others work with makes working with an individual organisation easier, which is certainly positive. Jonathon is only able to achieve this because the administration of individual social housing organisations does seem to be internally consistent. This allows him to build expertise in each individual organisation in a way that would not be possible if they were not internally consistent. He acquires the relevant policies from the organisations he works with, learns them very well, organises them into a filing system so that he can reference them when necessary, and methodically applies his knowledge to achieve his end. In this respect, he is the pinnacle of the informed, active citizen though for housing organisations, he was no doubt troublesome. However, the high degree of external inconsistency that exists between organisations has made it burdensome on Jonathon, and others, to obtain that expertise across all housing organisations. Each local authority is free to set its own allocation policies, as are each housing association within their boundaries. The task of gaining this expertise in every institution is therefore a monumental one.

Other participants expressed similar sentiments to those shared by Jonathon, above, though none were quite so rigorous in their pursuit of expertise with regards to allocation policies. Broadly speaking, applicants were divided into two camps: those that understood that social housing, as an institution, has been fractured into many organisations; and those that still believe erroneously that the local authority remains the primary gateway to social housing. In either case, the

fractious nature of social housing allocation presents problems of inconsistency that this research found to cause distress amongst applicants that perceive it or barriers to accessing housing amongst applicants that do not perceive the fracturing.

Take the case of Harold, a mid-thirties cleaner who flat-shares with his wife, young child, and another self-described “low-income” family in Waltham Forest. Harold has applied for social housing with one waiting-list based housing association. Unlike Jonathon, he has decided against pursuing applications with multiple organisations. He views this as too much work, given that he is already an employed person, a feeling which he describes in the passage below:

I know I could probably apply to more places for housing.

There are other housing associations out there, but they might not have a list as simple as this place. Here, I just put my name down, and I wait. Other places you have to go in for regular interviews, and stuff, and I just can't be bothered. It's too much work. I have enough work holding my job down so I can pay the ridiculous rent, I'm not about to spend what free time I have spending even more time on this housing stuff than I already do. I already check the bidding each week; a waste of time, that is.

I don't fully understand how this list works, if I'm honest with you. I know it's how long we've been on, and then they measure how much need we're in – somehow – but it's been a while since I filled out the form. And, I'd just have to go through the process again, and again, for all of these tiny little associations, and

for what? I probably won't get a home. It's too much work, like when you're filling out job apps, and every place has its own different form. After a while, you just can't be bothered. Especially when you'll never get in, anyway.

His feelings of futility aside, Harold's disinclination to seek out additional housing associations to apply with stems from the increased complexity that applying under many differing schemes would entail. At least, however, he knows that multiple applications is the optimal path. Many tenants were unaware of this, and still viewed the local authority as the only place to go, or even whatever single housing association they applied to. The participants limiting themselves to a single housing association through ignorance of other options are those with the least likelihood of success in their search for social housing. That Harold is disinclined to seek additional help because of the administrative burden it would require of him is problematic for this reason.

In Weber's envisioning of bureaucracy, the bureau applies rational rules to consistently, predictably, and justly distribute resources in a way that is transparent to both applicants to those resources as well as to bureaucrats themselves. According to Weber, there should be no mysteries about who is eligible for resources, who is not, and how individuals can best access resources. Harold's case represents one in which this is not so; he is unaware of the best strategy for gaining social rented housing, and this is partially because no housing organisation has informed him of the best strategies as, under Weber's imagining, is their obligation. This informative work is part of achieving consistency: to educate the population about the services they have access to.

Ultimately, the internal consistency of housing organisations is a strength of the sector. Broadly speaking, participants felt that they knew what to expect from the organisations which they worked with, even if their expectations between organisations varied considerably. Taken individually, housing organisations each rate favourably in terms of consistency; taken as a whole however, the social rented housing system lacks cohesion and standardised processes of application. This caused significant problems for many participants and represents a failure in the rationalisation of the social housing sector, even though participants felt that individual organisations were indeed consistent with themselves.

Transparency

One of the most significant pillars of the rational public institution is transparency. As a publicly funded service, social rented housing must be transparent to the public such that anyone seeking to apply to it for assistance can do so with knowledge about how they will be dealt with. Furthermore, the rational rules that govern social rented housing are agreed upon in a democratic method, and must therefore be transparent both for the applicant's sake and for public discourse to be had on the most effective means of service distribution. In the case of social housing allocation, transparency means the publication of the rules of housing distribution as well as the effective communication of those rules to applicants. A transparent social housing organisation is one that makes its allocations policies known publicly through as many forms of media as possible, including internet, written and personal interactions. Organisations which are not

transparent do not sufficiently publicise the functioning of their methods of distributing social rented housing.

An effective example of a transparent social housing organisation is the Borough of Hammersmith, whose website is very clearly written and explains who is eligible, who is not, the best methods for applying to social housing including reference to local housing authorities, and resources for those who do not qualify for social housing in the first place. On the other hand, as is representative of many housing organisations, Habinteg Housing Association's own website is rather unclear about the housing allocation process. The information here is limited to a single information line that housing is allocated on a waiting list basis, a single form to fill out, and a phone number to call. Given such an opaque process, it is no surprise that the allocation process generates extra work for the organisation, in the form of inquiring phone calls from the public to housing officers.

Participant responses regarding transparency of individual social housing organisations varied considerably. Interviewees indicated that some organisations were very transparent; others were not. The key difference in cases that reported transparency or opacity in allocation processes seemed to be the initiative of individual housing officer who went out of their way to educate participating applicants, a necessity arising from insufficient communication of other varieties on the part of the housing organisation. Individual officers often took it as their responsibility to educate some applicants, but this was only the case in some examples.

Take the case of Jeanine, for instance. She is in her 30's, applying for social rented housing for Hackney. In the passage below, she describes just how confusing

the process was for her, and how she went from the internet, to phone assistance, to in person assistance, before finally receiving some concrete answers to her questions about applying for social rented housing. Her feelings of confusion are evident in the passage below:

It's all very confusing. I mean, you might not know – at all – what in God's name you are doing. So your first step might be to go online and have a look around. But, there isn't any clear thing telling you exactly what to do. Do you know what I mean? There's no big, blinking arrow telling you "apply here." But I'm not that great with computers to be honest, so maybe it's down to that. I don't know. Anyway, I thought the website was completely pointless.

So what's your next step? You might phone in – which I did – but then the lady on the other end just tells you to apply online. That it's all there. Well I tried that already! So I said, "sod this," and just went to the council office in person, figuring that's the way it used to be and that sometimes, you've got to be in someone's face to get a proper response. Like, when they have to look you in the eye, they know they have to help you or you aren't going away. So I went to the council.

That's when I finally got the help I needed. Sure, I had to sit in line for almost two hours, but when I finally got seen, the woman was perfect. She sat me down, talked me through the whole process, showed me where I had to go on the website, and

explained what I had to do and what would happen next. She also told me it would probably be a long time until I was housed, being as how I already had a house with room for me and my daughter.

That was disappointing. But you know what? At least I knew. At least she told me. There should be more people working at the council like that. Now, why couldn't the woman on the phone have told me all that? Or, like, something easy to spot on the website? I'm not totally computer illiterate, as they say. I could have gotten the message.

Jeanine lives in Hackney with her mother, a 75 year-old retiree, and her pre-teen daughter. Her mother's former council-block home has three bedrooms, as it is where she raised her family prior to her children departing the household. Everyone has one bedroom to themselves, and as a result, neither the council nor any of the housing associations Jeanine has applied to consider her a priority case. When asked why she wants to leave when her housing situation does seem sufficient, she replies that she does not like the neighbourhood and she is not confident that her daughter is safe as she comes of age in "the bad part of Hackney." Local gang activity has driven her to apply for social rented housing elsewhere, which as described above was challenging. Her journey through the application process was confounded by what she felt was an uninformative website, an unhelpful telephone helpline, and a long wait to be seen by a housing administrator. Once she was seen in person, however, she was able to access the guidance she needed. In fact, as she indicates below, the person to whom she spoke was incredibly knowledgeable and helpful:

The woman I spoke with, she was so helpful. She might have been the bearer of bad news – that unless we had solid evidence of anti-social behaviour directed against us, we wouldn't be likely to be rehoused. That was too bad. But that she told me that at all, well, that was incredible. I had no idea what to do, I thought getting a house would be easy given our circumstances. And, she said we might still get one, and she was nice enough to walk me through the whole process, which I understand now. But I was so confused and frustrated until I talked to her. Now I'm just sad, and afraid that we won't get a place – but it's better to be just sad or afraid, than to be just totally lost.

Jeanine related many emotional experiences she had while applying for social rented housing. The council's website confused her; the telephone operator frustrated her and made her feel inadequate; and the long wait made her impatient. All of these emotions demonstrate why institutions should be as transparent as possible. Ultimately, it was the ability of one of Hackney's housing officers that put an end to Jeanine's confusion, and this was a pattern that was repeated throughout the interviews. Council and association websites, written media, and telephone staff were frequently not up to the task of communicating to potential tenants the processes required of them to make application to social housing, nor were they particularly informative about the odds of success of application or the reasons behind these odds. Broadly speaking, individuals were then left with little guidance or explanation from easily available media. Telephone operators often directed queries back to the organisation's website, or otherwise

indicated that they could give no guidance or information. This may be because housing organisation staff, particularly in housing associations which have fewer regulations about staffing than local authorities, are overwhelmed by the number of applicants attempting to reach out to them. As vacancies become more scarce and applicants more numerous, staffing would need to increase drastically to match increased demand for customer service. Yet given decreasing funding levels for social rented housing administration, this increased staffing level is unlikely to be the reality. Many participants, having not received the assistance they seek on the telephone or online, chose to attend local authority or housing association offices believing that they would obtain clearer answers in person. Sometimes, as in the case of Jeanine, this would work out because of the human touch offered by individual housing officers.

This speaks directly to one of Weber's fundamental criticisms of bureaucracy, and rationalisation more generally: the elimination of the unquantifiable, human component of experience in increasingly rationalised society. Though rational tools are often more efficient in their application, and better suited to meeting the quantified, numerical goals that have come to dominate operational processes, when dealing with people they often fail to provide the emotional, human support that people require as social beings. In essence there are multiple human needs, for food, shelter, and safety; one of these needs is socialisation, and it is this need that rationalisation often fails to provide, Weber argues. Narratives for this research confirm this to be the case; when individuals interacted with "good" housing officers, they felt much more supported even though their applications were failing as much as another, less supported

participant. The human touch is a significant factor, then, even if bureaucracies don't actively seek to implement it as is often the case in social housing.

Other times, participants complained that the human touch lead to conflict with housing organisation staff. One participant, Hank, was particularly displeased with how staff would treat him. He would often call to find out more information, but be told "nothing." Hank had this to say about his experience with housing associations in Tower Hamlets, in short that they would always refer him to the choice-based lettings website:

Look, you can call them up yourselves: they'll tell you one of two things, I guarantee it. Some, the big ones especially, will just refer you to the "local authority choice-based lettings scheme." They'll give you some website you have to go on to bid, but they won't tell you anything other than that. Zero. They'll just say it's nothing to do with them. Other housing associations will say that they don't know when they can house you, that they have no way of predicting how long your wait could be. Either response is totally useless to me. What can I do with that? What do I learn from that? Nothing! Absolutely nothing!

What I want to know is my place in line, you know, what's my number? But they can't – or they won't – tell it to me.

With respect to waiting time, most participants seemed to agree with Hank's sentiment that both local authorities and housing associations were opaque. Organisations that used a traditional waiting list were unable to tell applicants their "place in line," precisely because they are often aware that emergency cases will

trump non-emergency cases like Hank's. It is, according to several housing officers at Habinteg, therefore impossible for them to correctly estimate an individual's expected time or place on the waiting list. Meanwhile, organisations using choice-based lettings (CBL) schemes informed participants that quoting a waiting time was also not possible. After bidding for a home, applicants in a CBL scheme were usually informed about their ranking for each of their bids, but this retrospective information was only of limited use in estimating future bids. Still, as far as transparency goes, applicants tended to prefer choice-based lettings, partially because of this retrospective ranking. Jeanine, the woman applying from Hackney, said that one positive aspect of choice-based lettings compared to the waiting list was indeed more transparency:

Comparing the bidding to the waiting list, it's like... with the bidding, at least they tell you exactly why you didn't get a place. You can look at the criteria of the person that got a place, where they got the points from, and understand where you're falling short, so to speak. But with the waiting list, like from the association... I have no idea where I am, and they can't tell me what my chances of getting a place are. At least with the bidding, I understand what's going on. I can go on my computer – now that I know what I'm doing – and see exactly why what happened, happened. I'm more in the know.

Hank and Jeanine's experiences are representative of the feelings expressed by other applicants that were interviewed as part of this research. Internet media, broadly speaking, was insufficient to the task of instructing people about how to

apply to social rented housing, with supplementary telephone communications rarely satisfying, either. After what might be a significant wait at the council itself, some individuals were able to meet with particularly helpful housing administrators who were able to walk applicants through the waiting list or CBL process, after which, they had a significantly improved experience. Other, less effective administrators were again not helpful however, and so other participants reported high levels of dissatisfaction with them. In this way, luck played some role in applicant experience. Applicants found choice-based lettings to be more transparent than the waiting list. However, the opacity of the process of applying to social housing may represent a significant problem for these entities at an organisational level. The opacity of housing wait times, and how they are determined, was particularly frustrating for many participants.

Detriments of Rationalisation

Though objectivity, consistency and transparency are all beneficial, the use of rational authority in public institutions also carries with it certain risks if taken too far. Amongst these risks are reduced efficacy and dehumanisation. Weber himself presented these risks in his foundational works when he referred to perverted bureaucracy as the “iron cage.” Participants did indeed feel that social rented housing organisations were not sufficiently effective because of an over-reliance on rational tools, and that this over-rationalisation had led to feelings of dehumanisation. These detrimental aspects of participant experience with institutions of social rented housing will be discussed below.

Over-Rationalisation

The rationalisation of human experience within public institutions is meant to contribute to the consistent and objective treatment of individuals. This is certainly the case in social housing allocation, both in waiting lists and in choice-based lettings schemes; they quantify need and measure time to decide how to allocate homes in a fair manner. However, those working within and applying to public institutions must always keep in mind that this rationalisation is nothing more than a stand in for the infinite variability of human experience. Need can be quantified, but that quantification will be unable to communicate the reality which it attempts to represent. Hence the importance of qualitative data alongside quantified data, to give meaning to the numbers. Ironically, as rationalisation contributes to the just distribution of goods in a public context, its very operation may compromise the human condition by reducing it to something that is no longer recognisable as itself. The hallmark of this is the pursuit of the rational measurement itself, not the condition which it seeks to alleviate. Many participants felt that this had taken place within social rented housing allocation, given the sector's obsession with points-based assessments of need.

Laura was able to give a vague description of the problem that many participants had with the rationalisation of their need into a number for assessment purposes. She felt that it was not her need that was being interpreted by the housing organisations working with her application, but the points that were significant. Laura talks here about numbers and how important they are to a social rented housing application, but she highlights how dehumanising and exhausting this can be:

These numbers. It's tiring, you know? It takes it out of you. They assign you a number of points based on how much you need housing. Yeah, they literally rate your need on a scale, so they can compare it to other people's numbers. Which makes sense, I guess – I mean, how else would they do it so that it was fair? But you know what, it doesn't feel that good, to have a number assigned to your need. It makes sense, but it's silly, too. When asked, "what is my need?" what is the answer? If you asked me that, I wouldn't say "Oh, my need is, you know, about a 143. Maybe a 150." No, I would describe my situation to you, and that's how you know me, and what I need.

It's like, when I get together with other people I know, who are trying to get a council house. We could very well sit and ask each other "What's your number?" And sometimes we do – and I'll tell you, my number's not usually as high as theirs and that's not good for me – but more often, we discuss our situations. "Why do you need a council house?" It's not a number, it's a... problem, and that can't really be put into numbers.

But you know what's funny, is sometimes it gets me to thinking: how can I make my number higher? Can I push it up? So the numbers are more important. It's the numbers that matter, not my need.

Laura felt that the points that measured her need did a poor job at representing it. Though she recognised the necessity of the quantified

measurement as part of working in a larger system for social support, the resources for which are limited, she specifically identified her points and her need as two separate concepts. The housing organisations cared about her points; they did not care about her need. This represents a perversion in the purpose of these institutions because they exist to meet housing need, not to measure points.

Laura seemed rather frustrated that the housing officers did not want to hear her story, because she felt that it was relevant. Below, she relates her experience with housing officers and how they often do not care about her story, but only want to get to the numerical details of her case to process it. This, she indicates below, leaves her feeling unseen or unheard:

I call them up, to speak to them and tell them about the changes in my housing, and how things are getting worse for us as we burn through friends and family, and so on. But they really don't care about us having to move around so much. They always ask, how many bedrooms, how many kids, and such and such, to see how crowded we are. And it doesn't matter, we never reach the magical tipping point. They tell me, "this doesn't affect the points your case has," meaning it doesn't matter. Well it does matter, to me and my children yes it does, and it should to them as well.

It's hard to explain, it's a bit of a vague feeling of not being seen or heard, and I'm not sure why. It's just... they don't seem to care. If it doesn't affect the points, they don't seem to care.

Though Laura is unable to give fully descriptive words about her feelings, Jonathon's response is very specific owing to his encyclopaedic knowledge of social

rented housing policy and practice. He gave a response that is couched in procedural familiarity. Below, he expresses a knowledge that the process is only concerned with numbers, i.e. waiting time, overcrowding, etc., and indicates that it is important to know about these numbers

Applying to the bidding system is really about maximising your assessment of need. You really have to find every little problem you can possibly have, to get the highest number of points possible. And if you can make up a plausible problem, then you do it. Because it isn't actually about how much you really need housing, no, that's not something that the council is actually interested in. No, what they want to know is, what is your number? So that's how you have to think – strategically – to figure out how best to make your case as strong as possible.

It involves a lot of research, and work. You have to know, when you're filling out that form to the council, the exact ramifications of the options you're selecting. Because they won't necessarily be clear about it – they don't have to be. But you should know, "Okay, I'm overcrowded this much, that will be this many points," and so on. If you really want to be successful, that's something you have to do. You have to understand the numbers at work, if you really want to get into a place. And you have to know how far you can stretch the truth.

It isn't about your need. That's not what they're measuring. It's about your numbers. Sure, the numbers are meant to measure

your need, but it's the numbers you've got to worry about if you're serious. And I am.

It isn't ideal, to be honest. How often do I describe the exact detail of why I need housing to them? I don't, to be honest. I know what I need to say, and what they want to hear about, and I say it. It's not that I'm lying, although sometimes I guess I am a little; it's just that I'm only communicating the relevant bits.

But in actuality, what all else I have to say should be important, too. It should mean something that I haven't unpacked my boxes yet; it should mean something that I can't buy my own furniture. These things, they're part of why I need housing. They're painful to acknowledge, and maybe that's why the system that is in place, is in place, but these parts of my story... they should be acknowledged. I would feel better if they could be part of it.

But I recognise that would be difficult, you know, from their perspective. At any rate it's crystal clear that isn't what they care about. It's a waste of their time, and you can hear that in their voice when they're on the phone with you. Sort of like, "move along, move along."

Jonathon is very clear: it is not an applicant's need, as such, that housing administrators care about, it is their points. Therefore, it is their points that applicants too should care about. Yet to do so is to disconnect oneself from one's own needs, just as the housing administrators have done. Jonathon mourns that the fine, excruciating details of his own case cannot be part of his housing

application, as he feels that it is in fact an important part of “his story.” Points act as a barrier to insulate housing administrators from acting in a subjective fashion resulting from an emotional connection to the people applying to them for social rented housing. However, this insulation can be problematic when it divorces organisations from the purpose of their existence.

Weber discusses this problem in depth, and it is an issue that has been raised repeatedly in literature dealing with social services. Weber argues that, if an organisation comes to rely too much on rationalisation as a tool to achieve its goals, it is likely that the pursuit of that rationalised object itself will become the goal of that organisation, and not the condition which it represents. This is not desirable, because it does not align with one of Weber’s foundations of the effective bureaucracy – that it is oriented to achieving a shared, societal goal. To pursue the rationalised abstraction of that goal is not to pursue the goal. Furthermore, more recent authors (see Fitzpatrick and Pawson 2007 and Smith Institute 2006) have highlighted the role of rationalisation within a social service in encouraging beneficiaries to alter their own behaviours to better meet the rational criteria that enables service. This is known as perverse incentivisation (Fitzpatrick and Pawson 2007), and though Jonathan has been a successful applicant to social housing, it is through the pursuit of perverse incentives that he has been able to achieve this success. First, the bureau makes as its goal the rationalised abstraction, then the applicants seek to fulfil this abstraction, rather than seeking help because of the human condition the bureau is meant to target. This cycle perverts the provision of social services away from providing to those who need, and towards those who can successfully fool the system into perceiving the abstraction of need.

This research found a fair degree of perverse incentivisation, or at least the consideration thereof, in many participant narratives. There was a clear disconnect between how participants felt their needs were perceived and how they perceived their own needs; they did not feel that the points-based allocation of housing successfully captured their need, therefore they did not hesitate to game the system to gain access to what they saw as a needed resource. Jonathon was the best example of this, but there were many others.

Dehumanisation

One of the most significant potential costs of rationalisation is dehumanisation. Like over-rationalisation, dehumanisation arises from the very benefits sought by rationalisation, in this case detached objectivity. The word “objectivity” has “object” as its root, therefore perhaps it should be unsurprising that dehumanisation is a natural result of rationalisation when the process is taken too far. Some objectivity is useful in the search for a just society, but too much detaches people from one another in a way that is destructive. This is one of the great contradictions of the bureau, that they seek to eliminate some elements of humanity in decision-making while seeking to harness human strengths – flexibility and adaptability – to further an organisational agenda. Bureaucracy cannot be replaced by machines, because it requires judgement that machines do not possess. Yet to apply too much rationalisation to the practices of a public institution transforms it into a machine, and robs it of the humanity that makes it effective through flexibility and adaptability. At the same time, these rational processes

dehumanise the people seeking assistance from public institutions, because they become viewed as a series of operational inputs and, if they are lucky, outputs.

The dehumanisation of participants of this research was one of the most common themes observed during interviews. Participants working with more traditional waiting lists managed by housing associations did not describe dehumanisation as commonly as those working with choice-based lettings, but amongst the latter, dehumanisation was very common. This took place most commonly amongst older applicants who had experience with other methods of allocation, but even amongst younger applicants, many described dehumanising tendencies arising from choice-based lettings. There were two frequent responses to this point. The first response described how dehumanising it was to not interact with another person with respect to one's social housing application.

Jerry, a 60 year-old applicant in Southwark, discusses how it once worked with the local authority. He indicates that they were a supportive mechanism, there to understand and meet the needs of the applicant. He then goes on to describe how this has changed. He says it "feels different" now, as compared to then, as shown below:

It used to make you feel good, to talk to someone about your housing needs. The council was there to help you. They were on your side. Someone listened to your story – a person, listened to your story – they saw your need, and they acted, and helped you to act, to meet it. You felt heard, seen, cared for maybe. But I don't feel that anymore when I go on to bid. There's no personal touch.

Now, it just feels like my numbers have been plugged into a computer somewhere, and that computer has sort of... spat out a result. Like, I filled in a form, almost like a multiple-choice test, and gave that information not to a person, but to a machine to scan. And, it's done some calculations, and here we are. Maybe, if it had been a person making the decision, they would have understood my need more fully, and I would have gotten a house. Or maybe not.

It's just sort of... down to feeling, you know? With this bidding, when I don't get a place, there's no one saying "So sorry, we know you need this, and we're really doing the best we can," and all that. There's no softness to it, do you know what I mean? You just get this number, where you were in comparison to everyone else, and... it's hard to explain. It just doesn't feel good. It makes you feel like, like you're almost not there. Like no one sees you or know what you're going through.

Jerry is very emotive in his expression of how his social rented housing application makes him feel: as if he were invisible to those who, from his perspective, are meant to be helping him. He goes on to compare this to his experience with the housing association to which he also applies for housing, which he is significantly more positive about:

It's not like that when I go to [the association], no. With that, there is someone who I can call, and check how things are going. I know that person's name, she's in charge of my area, and

she can give me information. Or... maybe it's just comfort she can give me, that someone has heard my case and knows what I'm going through, and they're working for my benefit. It's hard times for getting a place, I know that – and they haven't been able to get me in anywhere, just like the council has failed. But, it's just good to talk to another person about it, if you follow. Like, they're seeing me. They know I'm here. That means something, even if it doesn't actually, physically get me somewhere.

Other participants were less vocal about how working with choice-based lettings made them feel *less human*, as Jerry has done, but more vocal rather about how it made them feel like they were *part of a machine*. Katherine and Perry, a young couple living together in one bedroom of Katherine's parent's flat in Wandsworth, said that working with the choice-based letting system made them feel like they were part of a machine. Katherine was particularly clear with her feelings, indicating that she has not met with anyone about her application in two years and that the only interaction with the housing application process has been through the computerised bidding system. This, she says, feels like a machine, not a supportive service:

I haven't even sat down to talk to anyone about our application, since our first appointment two years ago. I called them up, and they sent me the application form, which we filled out together. Then we mailed it in, and they called us to make an appointment to verify everything. Since then, it's felt so... mechanical.

Every week, I log onto the system to look at properties.

Thursdays, that is. I look at them, I bid on some usually, and then in the next week, I get a report back telling me how I did. Everything's done through the computer. I put information in, they put information out; I do it again, and again, and again, like some kind of robot. But does that information go anywhere? Does it actually do anything? It's all just numbers: points, you know, 30 points for overcrowding, 2 points for waiting, 10 points because I'm a local. And then there's your place in line: 75th out of 100-and-something, 80th, whatever. It's all just numbers in, and numbers out. Like a calculator.

But how does that actually get me anywhere? It's like a big "no" machine, and we're a part of it. But we have to be, if we're to get what we want. But really, what's the point? It's futile.

Katherine and Perry both came to their social rented housing application with pre-existing expectations. Katherine's mother, with whom the couple is currently living, spent over fifteen years housed by the Kensington and Chelsea local authority before purchasing a home for herself in Wandsworth. Likewise, Perry's single mother continues to reside in a housing association flat in Putney, with Perry's younger brother. Both families have a history of social rented housing, and their parents have tried to educate them about what to expect from the borough. Their experience has been of little use according to Perry, who like many applicants compares his own experiences to those of his parents in the passage below:

Things have changed completely. My mom said, when we started this whole thing, "Just phone them up, they'll help you." Well first of all, they haven't been able to help us; and second of all, we can't exactly phone them up. We have to do everything through the computer, which is actually quite frustrating, because – well, the computer can't understand your needs, can it? It just understands the numbers. What we need is someone to hear us out. But no, it's like we're not even here. The machine, the bidding system – it helps them to ignore us, that's what I think. It turns us into a number, and that's just not on.

Participant displeasure with the potentially dehumanising effect of choice-based lettings was a clear theme running throughout many applicant narratives.

Rational Authority as Self-Advancement

The intention behind rationalising aspects of society is to benefit it through the just distribution of collective goods and services. Rationalisation, in short, is assumed to be beneficial because of the positivistic nature of it. However, this assumed advancement should be questioned not only on the grounds of over-rationalisation and dehumanisation, as discussed above, but also because of the nature of rationalised organisations, like all organisations, to seek self-preservation above other things. Rationalisation itself does not offer a guarantee that a public institution will put society above itself; in fact, rationalisation can offer a method by which such organisations can mask their motives of self-preservation, through the use of rational, apparently relevant quantifications. If a rational public entity

achieves its numerical goals, it is often assumed to be doing good in society.

However, this assumed good may be an illusion created to preserve the organisation intact. To best assess the actual intent of such organisations, one must query those whom the organisation is meant to serve, and ascertain whether they do indeed feel that the public institution is serving their interest. This is a qualitative body of work, to interrogate client experience as positive or negative.

Many participants felt that changes to social rented housing allocation policy were made to ensure the continued existence of social housing organisations, this being prioritised over the client experience of social rented housing allocation systems. This carried significant costs for many participants, particularly amongst older people who are less able to meaningfully access choice-based lettings because of CBL's reliance on internet media.

Frank, an older applicant from Haringey, believed that the social housing application process had been computerised so that the local authority staff would not have to deal with applicants in person. Below, Frank articulates his perception the computerised waiting list as another barrier, purposefully interposed between him and the council and forcing him to act on his own behalf:

It's quite obvious why they've done it, isn't it? Before, we had people that used to help us. I mean, actual people, like that could pick up the phone. There was someone who I could call, and they could tell me basically where I was on the waiting list, how long I probably had to wait, what kinds of properties are available, that kind of stuff. There was someone there to help me. Now, I have to help myself, because there is literally no one on the other end.

Frank is several years away from receiving his pension, yet his income as a store clerk is insufficient to pay the rent on what he considers a “decent” home. Therefore, he house-shares with a group of other older adults. Together, the four of them rent a four-bedroom, semi-detached house in Haringey. The red-brick flat does not have a reception room, and Frank’s room itself is very small, so he asks to be interviewed at the small kitchen table that serves as the home’s only social space. He apologises for the lack of windows in the room. The dim, yellow light hanging from the ceiling casts everything in shadow. He retrieves an older-model laptop from his room to demonstrate how he uses the local authority’s choice-based letting scheme, but points out that many times, the listings don’t provide sufficient detail to inform him whether or not a property would be an appropriate match for him. Frank has a partial mobility-based disability: his limp makes it difficult for him to climb the short flight of stairs into the ground floor of his flat, and, as he ages and his condition worsens, he will eventually require a level-access apartment. The CBL page is not always as informative, therefore, as he needs it to be. Below, Frank describes the challenges that this poses for him, and how difficult it can be to get useful information out of housing officers. He then reiterates his belief that the bidding system is designed the way it is to specifically discourage people:

And if I call, say, the council, and have a question about a particular property, they direct me to the website with all of my questions, saying that that’s the only information they have. That’s not how it would have been. If I have a question about how to bid, or why I didn’t get a place, they just forward me to the website with

the policy, instead of sitting me down and explaining it. It's all about minimising the amount of contact we have with them, using the computer instead of people to make it so they don't have to work with us! Because it's cheaper, so it's better for them, you see. How many people do you think they have to hire to keep track of us, when we're keeping track of ourselves?

It's a question of resources. They don't want to spend the money to have people support us, so they've done away with it. It's self-serving, because now the work is on us, not them. Now, we've no longer any help. But we're the bloody people that need the help! Don't worry about yourselves so much, I say to them, worry about us...

Back in the old days, I would have called up the person who was handling my case. She would have worked for the council, and she would probably have known before even offering me the place, if it was level-access or not. I wouldn't even have to bother looking myself, but now that I do, people that I call can't even give me the answer. So, what they've done, is they've put that work on me, so that they don't have to do it themselves. Whatever they have to do to cut costs, that seems to be the motivation.

Frank argues that to better ensure their own financial security, housing organisations have reduced their own workload and transferred some of it back to applicants themselves. In some cases, this has completely removed the housing organisations from providing information to tenants. This causes Frank problems,

because he needs a particular kind of house and without being provided with the right information, he cannot make an effective choice about what listings to bid on. This, he believes, shows that organisations are minimising costs at the expense of applicants.

Other applicants acknowledged the self-preservative role of changes to social housing allocation, but took a broader perspective on the change, seeing it as a necessary shift resulting from reductions to funding for social rented housing and the administration thereof. Henrietta, for example, acknowledged that the way the system was designed was not ideal, but perhaps it was necessary given changing circumstances, particularly regarding funding for housing organisations:

It's understandable, you know. It isn't fun being on the receiving end of the abuse, but I think it's important for people to understand that it isn't really the council that is making these changes. They're just part of a bigger picture, aren't they? Housing associations and the council are needing to make these changes, because they don't have as much money as they used to. I think, unlike a lot of the people that complain so much about how things have changed – and, you know, I'm among them, too – but I think that I remember how many, what's the word... resources they had. They used to be building, building, building. I remember the 70's, tower blocks going up everywhere, new housing developments left and right. These people used to have money.

Well, they don't anymore. I think that's obvious. They probably have smaller staff, less houses to give away, and many

more people asking for them than they ever have before. So, maybe it's right that they find a way that puts the work back on us, because they can't do it all themselves. They call it a housing crisis, don't they? So maybe we shouldn't place all the blame on them.

Still, that can be hard to remember when you're wrapped up in your own case.

The dialogue that is formed between Frank and Henrietta's testimonies is an interesting one, and one that is reflected in public discourse on the housing situation. On the one hand, there are those that feel that, with tightening purse strings, so too should social housing become less funded, and therefore more difficult to acquire and run with a lower administrative overhead. In this case, the lower cost of choice-based lettings to administer is advantageous, perhaps even necessary. Other participants, however, felt that the changes in social housing allocation have been motivated not by a necessity, but rather are undertaken to improve the profitability of housing organisations and therefore to help them thrive in opposition to the provision of higher quality service. Participants disagreed significantly on this point, but many felt that the shift towards choice-based letting was against their interest and in favour of housing organisations, even if they understood that reduced resources had been a catalyst for the change.

The Outcome of Using Public Administration

Public Administration, and the work of Max Weber in particular, has been incredibly useful in this research for framing the "performance" of social housing organisations. Although a fundamentally structural violence approach was used in

this research to focus on individually narrated experience, interpreting this experience through the lens of public administration's ideal operation of public institutions has allowed for an insight into what social housing organisations may be doing well, and what they may not be doing so well. For this reason, I recommend introducing such "best practice" considerations into other studies examining social services, which often carry out quantitative or qualitative studies but often do not examine institutional operations themselves. As an employee of several institutions of social services, I have found this to be incredibly valuable, and can

Conclusion of Chapter 5: Rationalisation

The purpose of this chapter has been to explore participant experience to answer the research question "what are the positive and negative aspects of rationalisation experienced by applicants to UK social rented housing today?" Those interviewed did indeed experience both benefits and detriments because of increased rationalisation in social housing allocation. The most significant positives described were transparency, objectivity, and internal consistency, though inconsistency between different organisations was communicated as a drawback of the recent fracturing of social housing resources. The most significant negatives experienced were over-rationalisation of experience and need, dehumanisation of applicants, and the feeling that the shift to choice-based lettings was made to better preserve housing organisations' fiscal sustainability. These are mixed findings, indicating that social housing is embracing some of the strengths of formal rationalisation while also exhibiting certain of its problems, as well.

The stark difference between participants' assessments of organisations using waiting lists versus those using choice-based lettings leads me to believe that it is necessary to further examine the specifics of this dichotomy. This will be the purpose of the following chapter.

Chapter 6:

Allocation Mechanisms

Previous chapters have discussed, in a tangential way, the broad change in social rented housing allocation from waiting lists to choice-based lettings. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss this change directly, as well as its effect on participants and how little this change has affected the outcome of participants' social rented housing applications. In short, the shift to choice-based lettings has made applying to social rented housing significantly more confusing and burdensome, but not improved people's chances at accessing it. In fact, it appears that choice-based lettings have masked an increasing shortage of available social rented housing, causing applicants to scapegoat groups for these shortages when in fact the shortage is likely systemic in origin. Meanwhile, government funds for social rented housing continue to be funnelled into home ownership programs, to which applicants did not have access – a reality which many were vocal about. One phrase was repeated by more participants than any other: "What's the point?" Specifically, they questioned the usefulness of applying to social rented housing when they were almost certainly not going to gain access to it, but for the purposes of this chapter the question can be repeated and taken more broadly. In keeping with an STS approach to the mechanisms of social housing allocation, we are led to ask: "What is the intended purpose of the mechanisms of social housing allocation?" It is evident that there is some cultural lag between the popular perception of social rented housing allocation; STS has been used to access the changing purpose of social rented housing allocation in these changing times.

This chapter will deal with these complex issues. The primary purpose of the chapter is to examine the mechanisms of social housing allocation as identified by participants, namely waiting, rationing, and choice. The mechanism of choice in particular has ramifications for social housing literature, which questions the value of choice-based lettings in an environment where social rented housing is as scarce as it is in London. This discussion of choice then segues into consideration of how choice has obfuscated a shift in UK social housing away from targeted assistance to vulnerable people, towards universal assistance that is less beneficial for the participants of this research.

Allocation Mechanisms Identified by Participants

“What’s the point?” asks Megan, seated on a couch in her mother’s flat, her one-year-old son on her knee. “I bid on a lot of places, and it doesn’t get me anything. It makes me want to give up.”

The first task of this chapter is to explore participants’ own answers to this simple question, repeated again and again by different interviewees. Participants came to their local authorities with an expectation that they would receive housing assistance in the form of social rented housing. These expectations were for the most part not being fulfilled, yet to realise this they had to run a gauntlet of housing applications and failed attempts at gaining a tenancy. It is a tiring process that has left many feeling disenfranchised, abandoned by their government in their time of need. More than any other question asked, applicants often wondered about the purpose of “the system.” Why make them apply for social rented housing, when their chances of success are so low or their wait time so long?

“Why,” as another applicant put it, “the song and dance?” In the end many participants provided answers their own questions, working through the competing demands placed upon the social rented housing systems using their own experience as a guide. In their explanations for the functioning of the system, participants repeatedly identified three different purposes: to make one wait for a scarce resource, to ration that scarce resource to those who need it most, and to give more choice in housing to those to whom housing resources are rationed.

These questions of purpose align naturally with those posed by literature taken from Science, Technology, and Society studies. By viewing “the waiting list” as a technology for the distribution of social rented housing, we can examine the outcomes of its applicants to identify the actual purpose of the machine. Participants indicated that allocation methodologies had created waiting, rationing, and choice-enabling mechanisms for those running the gauntlet. Though participants broadly identified three cohesive elements of the social housing allocation machine, their perspectives on each of these elements contrasted in meaningful ways. First, participants identified a waiting function; though they disagreed as to whether or not that waiting was implemented purposefully by housing organisations to reduce the number of people applying for housing by making some of them lose patience and give up. Second, participants identified a rationing mechanism; though they disagreed on exactly how that rationing worked. Many identified certain groups, whether they were refugees, members of a nation, a race, or people claiming a category of need, as being more preferred than any other group and therefore taking up all the vacancies. Most of these assumptions were incorrect, and very few participants identified scarcity of housing as the

primary cause for the necessity of rationing. Third, participants identified an element of choice in the functioning of social housing allocation; though they rated this favourably or unfavourably depending on how advanced their own applications were. For those near to getting a social letting, choice seemed useful; but for those unlikely to be successful, it only frustrated and further demoralised them. Each of these juxtaposed ideas about the three mechanisms of waiting, rationing, and choice will be explored through applicant narrative below.

Waiting

“...it makes me want to give up,” concludes Megan from her mother’s couch. Like so many other tenants, she has taken up residence back in a childhood home after having a child of her own. She is in her late twenties, with a one-year-old boy with an absent father. Her current home is extremely similar in layout to that of many other participants: a three-bedroom, former council flat, this one in Tower Hamlets. One bedroom is occupied by her widowed mother; the second, by her younger and childless sister; the third, by herself and her new son. As far as rational measurements of overcrowding go, Megan admits that she is in a better position than others. Technically she is still overcrowded, as by government legislation her child should have a bedroom of his own, but four people living in a three-bedroom home with no other criteria of need has not put her near the top of the list. Even so, she feels justified in applying for housing, but after a year of waiting she has become impatient. She expresses this impatience in more detail below, acknowledging that even though there are others likely waiting longer than her or in more need, that fact does nothing to alleviate her own need:

I know that there are other people who have been waiting longer than I have. Like, I have friends with multiple children, living with their parents in the same kind of flat I have, so I get that they should come first and all that. It's only fair.

But like, I've not been waiting that short a time either, you know? I signed up when I found out I was pregnant, which was just about two years ago. They said then that it could be a few years, and I thought: okay, okay. I'll be patient. But it's been two years now, and that should be long enough that I could have had some kind of progress. Like, gotten a decent shot somewhere. But I keep getting placed at, like, 60 out of 100, like. And I think to myself: that's actually quite low, isn't it? How long until I get to, like, the top 10? Or even get a place? It could be years, many years more. So I can't help but wonder: what's the point? What's the point of waiting, and bidding, and going on to the website and looking...? What is the point?

So yeah, that's enough to make you give up. My situation right now is like, okay. It's a little cramped but it gets the job done, it's really not that bad. We could probably make it work, you know, especially when my sister moves out.

Then I think to myself: maybe that is the point. You know, if you can wait it out this long, why not just figure out your housing for yourself? Maybe they want you to give up.

Although Megan's conclusion is perhaps more purposeful on the part of social housing officers than many applicants felt it might be, her sentiment that part of the purpose of the system was to force people to cease the active pursuit of their applications was a common theme. Whether by purpose or by happenstance, nearly every participant indicated that the process of applying to social rented housing required great patience, spanning years. Most also indicated that the length of time over which their application took place caused them to call into question their perseverance in making application. Josiah, from Poplar, specifically did not agree with Megan that people had intentionally designed the allocation process to make people lose patience, but instead believed it to be an unintended consequence of low housing supply. Still, he believed the outcome to be the same. He describes how the complex process is discouraging, below:

The way it works makes you want to walk away. You spend years applying, on various lists and on the bidding web site, but you don't really get anywhere. It literally gets you nowhere, nothing. After a little while, you just want to give up, and I know a lot of people that have given up. What's the point of trying, if it's not going to get you anything?

It's not on purpose, I think. It's just the way it works out. There aren't enough places to go around anymore, so if you want a place and you don't need it as much as some others, then you have to wait. Probably for a long time, and it always seems to be just getting longer and longer. It's enough to make you give it up, even if that isn't their goal.

It's just the way it works out. You just have to wait a really long time.

Josiah, like Megan, lives with an older, widowed parent. However, his father has downsized into a new, one-bedroom council flat and if not for Josiah, would live there alone. It is a modern accommodation. Unlike many of the council-owned homes occupied by other participants, the electrical furnishings are new. The insulation is good. The carpet in the halls and bedroom are fully intact, and kept fastidiously clean. Overall, Josiah's home is one of the highest quality ones observed throughout. However, it is still overcrowded according to the rules of most allocation policies, with two non-coupled adults living in a one-bedroom home, though once again not statutorily overcrowded as there are technically two sizeable rooms in the house. The middle-aged man is aware that his current conditions alone will likely not be enough to earn him a social letting of his own, and his next phrase is rather representative of views held by many other participants. It is a phrase which lends itself as the title of this thesis, and is perhaps the most powerful takeaway of this research. Josiah's passage, below, is the most poignant example of this phrase found in the interviews for this research:

I'm only overcrowded, see? And if you're only overcrowded, you have to wait and wait and wait. Then maybe you'll get a house. Maybe. But... probably not, I think.

Yeah, I think that's the problem. I'm only over-crowded. That used to be good enough, I think, like back in the day. I don't know, I didn't really apply back then, but it seems like it would have been easier to get help. But now... I think you need to be really bad off.

Like, crippled, with three kids and on the verge of being homeless, to get a place. But I haven't got any kids. My situation is cramped, but I'm basically surviving. So yeah, I'm only overcrowded. I think that's the problem.

Participants often acknowledged that there were fewer social vacancies than there were people desiring to fill them. Waiting, most agreed, was an inevitable outcome of this reality. Participants were divided however on the degree to which this waiting had been introduced or perhaps exacerbated to encourage people to give up on their applications to social housing. The question was raised repeatedly, though not in so many words: were local government and housing associations making people wait for long periods of time as a filtration mechanism, to remove from the waiting list those that could in fact provide decent, if not ideal housing for themselves?

Many participants defined their current housing circumstances as “bearable,” if not ideal. Under the letter of the law, these households are entitled to socially rented housing, and so they had made application. Functionally speaking, however, the relative lack of urgency with regards to their housing situation meant that they consistently scored lower on the measures of need employed by local authorities. Though they were entitled to help, therefore, it was very unlikely that they would receive it simply because there were households that needed it more and resources were limited. Living in self-defined “acceptable” conditions, these households had often given up on their housing applications, and many such people wondered if this outcome was something that the architects of allocation systems had purposefully implemented. Participants’ opinions on this varied

significantly. Some believed waiting had been implemented intentionally; others did not.

Rebecca is an older woman living by herself in a Hackney Homes flat. Formerly a council flat, the property was transferred to the ALMO (arms-length management organisation) some time ago. Now that she is suffering from knee pain, she wants to move out of her lift-serviced, fourth floor apartment into a ground floor unit. Her case has been deemed non-urgent by the council's occupational therapists, however, and so she has had to wait alongside many other applicants until her condition degenerates to a point at which the council recognises her as "in need." Because ground floor flats are in higher demand amongst medically disabled applicants, it would currently be a long wait for her. In the statement below, she indicates that she has remained positive that it is not the council's intention to make her give up, but merely an unfortunate side effect of outside influences such as immigration and the need for lower budgets for the development of additional social rented housing.

I know that I have to wait to get a house. I think that's because we have all these people coming into the country, immigrants and refugees and things, and we have less houses to go around too. So there are more people, and less places for them. Which means everyone has to wait longer. I don't want to say what I think of those people coming in, because I don't want to be rude, but I understand having to wait my turn.

Five years seems a little long though, doesn't it? I remember back when I was a young woman, there was just no way I would

have to have waited that long then. I got this place here very soon, and I don't really understand why things have changed so much.

Some of my friends think they've done it on purpose, made people wait so long. Like if they make us wait, we'll just go away.

Like they're making us wait on purpose, to get us to go away. But I don't think that. I think the council is doing the best they can, what with them having less money to do it with and these immigrants coming in.

The issue of immigration is an entirely different subject that speaks to many applicants' misunderstanding about how allocation processes work, and this will be discussed below. What is most notable about Rebecca's narration is that she lays very little blame on local authorities or housing organisations for the long wait she faces for social housing. She believes it is outside developments that have made housing scarce.

Other participants felt that housing organisations did indeed design allocation methods that would encourage people to give up, as a way to provide fewer homes. Scott is a single father of two school-aged boys. He rents a two-bedroom home in Hammersmith, working as a night concierge and grocery clerk to pay his rent. Like many other participants, his flat is a former council property, and was purchased some time ago by a private landlord who has done little to renovate the property. It is on the eighth story of a tower block that needs many repairs. The flat is small, and feels cramped. Storage shelves and cupboards line the walls, and possessions occupy all of the available space. The living room barely has enough room left for the sofa Scott now occupies. Though they are not technically

overcrowded because Scott's children are the same gender, the single father still complains of the lack of space, poor quality of the home, and the economic burden the high rent places on his household. He has relatively low priority on the waiting list, but has persistently bid for several years now and so has accrued some number of points. Unlike Rebecca, above, he believes the council has made him wait a long time to encourage him to give up on his application for social rented housing.

It's like they've done it on purpose. I log into this stupid portal every week to check for new places. Thursdays is when I do it, it's my day off. I check, and I bid, and every week I get turned down. The best I've done was 25th out of about 70 people, and that was extremely odd. I tell you, I'm never going to get a place at this rate. Sometimes I just want to give up, do you know what I mean?

But you know what? That's what they want you to do. They don't want to give you a house, the council, even though you're entitled to one! My father paid taxes, I pay taxes, and I need the help. But they just want to turn me away. They can't, though!

So what do they do? They make you wait forever, knowing that eventually that'll get to most people and they'll give up. You can't blame them for giving up either, it takes so bloody long. I'm not going to give up, though. Eventually they'll have to house us. It's their obligation, and they can't make me forget that.

Scott and Rebecca represent the two most commonly held participant perspectives with regards to waiting. Scott believes that the council is making him wait for a longer than necessary period to encourage him to give up on his

application for social rented housing. This, to Scott, is a strategy to reduce the number of homes they need to provide. Rebecca meanwhile believes that the long waiting period is a necessary response to changing circumstances as more people apply for housing, and less money is allocated for the development of new housing. She does not believe longer waiting times are a purposeful strategy to reduce the council's housing obligations. Both perspectives are representative.

Despite this division, all participants to this research had either been made to wait several years for social rented housing, or been informed that they would likely be made to wait for several years. This, participants were frequently informed, was a result of there being many people that needed housing more than the participants themselves. Most participants therefore identified that one of the primary purposes of social housing was indeed to make them wait, while housing was rationed to other households. Rationing was therefore a logical next function of the social rented housing allocation machine to be discussed.

Rationing

Most participants identified that one of the primary purposes of the social rented housing allocation systems they interacted with was to identify which applicants needed housing assistance the most, and ensure that assistance went to these people first. By definition, those interviewed for this research were not in emergency need of housing. Most therefore readily admitted that their situations did not require immediate rehousing in the way that other people's might. Very few tenants used the word "rationing," yet this was the concept that so many skirted. Both waiting lists and choice-based lettings systems are designed to ration available

social vacancies to a select group, and this was a function that nearly all applicants recognised. Participants acknowledged that there were other applicants who needed housing more than they did, but critically, they indicated that they did not expect housing to be so severely rationed at the outset of their application.

One participant said the below about rationing, articulating an understanding of the social housing problem as one of supply, and a problem that cannot be overcome simply by one being in need of housing. There is not enough housing to go around, this participant argued, and there were people that needed it more than him.

I understand the problem. Like, things are bad for us – I know it, most people would know it. We're crammed in here like sardines, is how I feel. But here's the thing: they're bad, but they're worse for other people. Other people have it worse than us. So, what can they do, but give the houses to those other people?

We're only overcrowded.

Other people asking for housing, you know, they have, like, disabilities and stuff. Maybe they're in a wheelchair, or on crutches or something. Like, sick, right? Maybe they've got more kids than us, or they don't have family to stay with. Maybe they pay really high rent. Or they're like, homeless.

But us? Yeah, it's bad. But it could be a lot worse.

While recognising the necessity of rationing, other participants also stated that the relative needs of others did little to change the urgency of their own needs. Other people might need housing more than any given applicant

interviewed for this research, but many participants indicated that their needs were still pressing despite this fact. Another participant also articulated an understanding of the problem as one of there being more people that needed social rented housing than there were houses to supply that need. However, this participant was more angry about not having his needs met, despite there being others with more urgent need. Many participants shared this sentiment, put concisely below:

I know that there are others who need housing more than I do. And maybe they should get preference, I can see the logic in that. But the thing is: I still have needs. Just because someone needs it more than me doesn't mean I don't need it, too.

I've got three kids, right? And they need more space than they have right now, and I can't afford to give it to them. So we need the help!

Don't get me wrong, I know there's probably a family out there with a kid in a wheelchair, and they need a ground floor flat or something. And there's probably some mother like me, only her husband is beating her, so the family needs to get out of there. I'm not saying anything about them. They need housing, a lot, more than we do I guess. I hope nothing but the best for them, I hope they get what they need.

But what they need doesn't change what I need! We both need it, so we both deserve help, you see? So what if they deserve it more, we still deserve it too. We're in the same boat really.

These illustrate two different perspectives on rationing that interviewees often held. On the one hand, participants were usually willing to acknowledge that they may not need social rented housing as much as some other, more desperate household or category of household. Most often, these were thought to be homeless families, households with disabled members, or households with an abusive parent or spouse. Most participants indicated that such people should rightly have housing preference over the participants themselves, because of the other parties “emergency” situation. On the other hand, those interviewed also often argued that even though there were groups with more need than themselves, they were still very much in need, and therefore deserving of assistance. Most participants felt that they were justified in asking for housing assistance from local authorities and housing associations even though they were aware that there were people in more need than them. Participants therefore disassociated the concepts of deservedness and rationing; just because social rented housing had to be rationed as a result of limited resources, did not mean their own households did not deserve the help – they still did, according to participants. This indicates that participants still felt social rented housing was “their right,” in the words of one interviewee, regardless of whether it was available. Many participants felt they had been “denied their right to housing,” though they were unable to specify from where this right arises, legislatively speaking. In fact, there is no legislative basis for a right to housing, except in the most extreme cases as have been discussed here, such as statutory overcrowding.

In fact, participants were broadly ignorant of the actual laws and rules surrounding social rented housing allocation. Most participants in this research

were rather uneducated about the policies of social rented housing allocation that determined how their needs were measured. Most participants simply filled out a form and sent it to the council, many without even meeting with a housing officer as part of the process. As such, they were fundamentally unaware of the rules defining their priority; who was likely in front of them, and who behind. In absence of this knowledge, many had assumed that various groups were preferred. These assumptions varied incredibly, but were frequently at least partially incorrect along several thematic lines.

Many participants believed that most social vacancies were being let to refugees. Rebecca, who had initially declined to speak on what she called the “refugee issue,” later went into greater detail about how she felt it was refugees that were taking up all the social rented housing vacancies:

I'll tell you what the problem is. It's these refugees that are coming in, claiming asylum or whatever. They come in, and we've got to help them, so they get all the houses on a first-come, first-serve basis. They show up, they get a house, it's easy for them.

Me? I've got to go onto this bidding thing, and bid for my houses, knowing I'm not going to get it. How is that fair? They show up and get a house, but me, an English woman, have to wait for years to get one? That ain't fair at all!

I feel for those people, I really do. Something should be done for them, but not at the cost of our own citizens. We have to take care of our own first, isn't it?

Other tenants believed most rented social homes were going to immigrants from within the European Union, particularly Eastern Europeans. For example, one participant was particularly convinced that Polish immigrants were “taking all the homes,” as they put below:

If it wasn't for all these Poles, we could probably get a place! It's not right, all the immigration that's coming in. They come in, they take our jobs, and then they take the houses right out from under us! What are we left with, us good, hard-working English? No jobs, and no help to be had. It's a shame, it is.

National or racial prejudice was one of the most common themes in people's failed attempts at gaining a social rented housing. Many believed that, as a group, one race or nationality was “taking up all the places.” The most common groups about whom this belief was held were south Asians and Eastern Europeans. One participant from north London had this to say about the Bangladeshi population in east London:

It's all these Bangladeshis, isn't it? That's the whole neighbourhood now. I'm not trying to be funny, but this used to be a white neighbourhood. Nothing wrong with them, now, but it's true! They come over here, have a bunch of kids, and get themselves a nice council house just like that. They're taking up all the places! How can, like, my daughter with her kids compete with that?

If you ask me, you should only be able to get so many points for kids. As it is, you get more points for every kid you have. Well,

that's rewarding people for bad behaviour! That's one of the problems in this country. Immigrants coming in and having a million babies, just to get benefits. We've got to stop that from happening.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the river in Southwark, an Afro-Caribbean woman said this about preferential treatment towards white applicants:

Sometimes I think, if we were white, we would probably have a place by now. Maybe not, maybe I'm crazy, but you can't help thinking these things.

I don't know how they do it, but like, maybe they give some kind of preference to them. Like, maybe they sneak in a few points here and there, where they shouldn't have, and that can make a difference. Not even based on race, probably not as on purpose as that. Probably you know, the lady at the council just... likes this other family more. She might not know she's being racist, she just thinks she's doing a nice family a favour. But those extra few points for them, it's just like taking points from us.

Yeah, I could see that. It wouldn't surprise me.

Finally, a white, English retiree from west London said this:

I know this old, Afro-Caribbean lady from the library. She's about my age. Well, she hurt her hip last year, and complained to the council that she needed to be rehoused because she couldn't get up the stairs. Quick as can be, she's in a new flat!

Now, me? I have pain, too. I've complained to the council, but I haven't got a new place, have I? No, I'm still here. Now, why is that, I wonder? I'll tell you why. It's because she's black and I'm white, and they don't want to look racist.

Overall, individual participants expressing certain characteristics of preferred need – i.e. medical need, overcrowding, threat of homelessness, economic burden, etc. – most frequently blamed another such group for occupying vacancies. For example, participants who were requesting housing assistance based on medical need often believed it was overcrowded households that were receiving most new social lettings. One participant said this about how households with many children were being allocated a majority of the rented social homes:

I can't get up that stairs, so I've had to move into the ground floor room. That's a kid's room, it's tiny, but I make do. There's a toilet down here too, so it's okay. But I really need a more suitable place.

You know who's getting all the places? It's those mamas popping out kids like there's not tomorrow. If you've got enough kids, and your place is small enough, the council will give you a home every time. I guess that's some kind of solution, isn't it? I should just have a few more kids, eh? That would solve my problem.

I tell you, they give more preference to bigger families. But that leaves people like me out, now doesn't it? That's not right.

On the other hand, participants with large families whose applications had merit on the grounds of overcrowding often cited the reverse, that medically disabled people received more preference than them. Another participant gave an interview in which they expressed an opinion diametrically opposed to the previous one, where they claimed that disabled people were being allocated more socially rented homes:

I have a family, you know? That's important, isn't it? That children get a good home? I know that there are a lot of people out there, a lot of disabled people or people who pretend to be disabled, and that they get most of the housing. We hear about it all the time. This person needs a ground-floor flat, that person gets this...

But what about me and my kids? We need a house. Families should come first, because they're kids and we're, well, more people if that makes sense? Most of these people are probably faking it anyway, for the check and for the house...

Broadly speaking, it seemed like participants identified themselves as members of certain groupings of need, such as overcrowded or disabled. When their applications were unsuccessful, they first blamed other groups for this failure rather than the overall shortage of social rented housing that is prevalent throughout social housing organisations in London and the south east. Relatively few participants comprehensively understood the scarcity of social rented housing in the modern era, nor did they understand the systems by which scarce allocations were made. The ignorance of participating applicants about the systems of social

rented housing allocation under which they were applying speaks directly to the Science, Technology, and Society literatures consulted in preparation for this research that questioned the value of quantification in society. These literatures largely questioned quantification on the basis of the ability of rational measurements to adequately represent unique realities, particularly in the social services (see Porter 1996; Espeland and Stevens 2008; and Rizo 1991 for examples). Though this difficulty was noted throughout this research when participants complained that their needs were not being adequately perceived by housing officers, the findings demonstrated above describe another problem presented by quantification: that it can mystify processes to the uninitiated. As demonstrated in social rented housing allocation when needs-based applications are made and assessed for a points-value, quantification of human experience in social services creates a barrier between the people being served and their understanding of the systems that serves them. Participants of this research did not adequately understand the points-based systems of allocation, largely because of this propensity for mystification. Many participants complained that they did not understand how points were allocated, or described erroneous understandings.

A few participants had successfully decoded the quantified assessment of need, however, and were able to harness this understanding to gain housing in spite of increasing scarcity of rented social dwellings. Though some might argue that he is gaming the system or making use of perverse incentives (see Turner 2009), once again, Jonathon is the most prominent example of a participant who has educated themselves about the social housing organisations he is applying to, as well as the social rented housing situation in the UK. Jonathon describes the

problem as one of rationing, where housing only goes to those that need it most.

This, he indicates below, is why he has educated himself about the allocation system to such an extent:

It's like this: there is just not very much housing, like, at all.

And I mean there is next to nothing, compared to how it used to be.

I've read about this. They stopped building new houses thirty years ago, but the population has kept growing, and we've got more immigration now than ever, too. So there are more people, and there are just no new houses. I think a lot of people don't get how few houses there are.

The reason I'm so well educated about the system is that I get that fact. If you want to get a house, you have to really, really need it. I mean, need it, okay? You have to be overcrowded, disabled, and homeless all at once. That's the only way you're guaranteed a spot. You need to need it, man.

If you can't tick all those boxes, then grab some snacks, you know what I mean? Because you're in for a long wait. So best educate yourself about your rights. Know how to tick those boxes, my friend.

Jonathon's familiarity with social rented housing in the UK was unique amongst all participants; no one else had attained this level of mastery or understanding. Though other participants did communicate the rationing function of social rented housing allocation, the majority were unable to correctly identify how this rationing worked. Rather than identifying the markers as Jonathon does,

above, they emphasise the role of race, national origin, and immigrant status as significant elements of the application process; when they did identify legislatively preferred groups, such as homeless, disabled and overcrowded households, they incorrectly perceived that one such group received systemic preference than another as another way to scapegoat the failure of their own application.

Participants sought to blame others for their failure to gain social rented housing. In fact, it is not any particular group that is causing the social housing shortage, unless that group is “emergency applicants” taken broadly. Rather it is the broad shortage of new rented, social housing units that has created the social rented housing crisis participants experience today. Participants’ ignorance of this condition, as well as their ignorance of the actual rules by which social housing vacancies are allocated, are troubling.

Choice

The final mechanism of the social rented housing allocation system that participants identified was that of choice. Participants communicated that if they rated higher on local authority measurements of need, they felt that they would have a great degree of choice in where they would be housed by the local authority because of the functioning of choice-based lettings. In a choice-based lettings scheme, a household with many points will be able to bid more competitively with other home seekers, and gain access to better properties. For those with a greater level of measured need, therefore, this is a beneficial system.

Gerald, the patriarch of a four-person household currently renting a private, two-bedroom home explained this succinctly during his interview. Below, he

describes that the system is actually working well for him, because he will likely be housed imminently and he believes that his high assessment of need will give him a greater degree of choice in housing, when his time comes:

I understand the purpose of this bidding system. It's actually very clear. If you can score high enough on your application, then you can basically choose where you live. If you can't score high enough, you'll take what you can get, the places that no one else wants. Of course, there's not many of those...

For us, it's kind of encouraging, because at this point we're borderline. We've been on the list for about three years now, and we're overcrowded and my son and daughter are getting older. As they do, it gets less appropriate for them to share a room... and pretty soon, they'll bump us up. Right now, we sometimes get to number 12 or 15, which might not sound like much but that's pretty close.

My daughter turns 9 next year, and that will bump us up one category on top of the points for the extra year. So I think, we'll be able to get our pick of the places then. Which is better than how it used to work, like for my parents. The council just kind of assigned us our house when I was a kid, but I'll probably get to pick. That's an improvement.

Gerald's case is unique amongst participants. He is at a point in the application process where he will likely be housed in a social rental soon, which cannot be said for most other interviewees. This is because he is currently renting a

two-bedroom home, meaning that his two opposite-gender children are sharing a room. It is acceptable under government legislation for a boy and girl to share a bedroom through the age of 8, at which time room-sharing grants additional preference for overcrowding. By this time, Gerald will also have been registered on the list for four years. This combination of time spent on the list and opposite-gender, adolescent children sharing a room will ensure that Gerald has many points of need. At that time, the choice-enabling mechanisms of social rented housing allocation policy will be a boon for this household. They will likely acquire tenancy in a desirable property. He speaks about how this makes him feel here:

And that's pretty exciting. I can go online, have a look at all these houses, and know that pretty soon I'll be able to actually pick one. Pick one! That's not how it used to work, but I know when the time comes I'll have a good selection, at least probably six or seven, and if I don't like them I can hang on a few more weeks and try for something that will be really good for my family.

I think it's a great change, this bidding thing. It gives you real choice in where you end up housed, and that's just so much better. I don't have to go with some tower block place like they used to stick you with; I can maybe wait for a bungalow, or something.

Amongst other benefits, allowing choice encourages new tenants to view their homes positively and inclines them to invest in their neighbourhoods while simultaneously decreasing proclivity for anti-social behaviour. These were amongst the reasons cited for adoption of choice-based lettings in the first place, and so it

comes as no surprise to see Gerald expressing some of these positive elements of shopping for a social home now that he is at the end of his waiting period.

However, Gerald was a singular case. All other participants interviewed for this research were people whose applications had been historically unsuccessful because a lack of emergency need like that soon to be expressed in Gerald's household, and they therefore gained no such benefit from choice-based lettings. For these households, the "choice" in "choice-based lettings" amounted to nothing, often viewed as an unattainable fruit too far from grasping to seem tangible, real, or beneficial. Many participants expressed that the choice offered successful applicants was more demoralising, standing in such stark contrast to the severe lack of choice or assistance that ongoing applicants received.

Marion is a middle-aged woman with two teenage children, a son, and a daughter. She works two part-time jobs to afford the private rent on her three-bedroom Tottenham home. It is a former council flat, and in need of many repairs that will likely go undone. Her kitchen sink leaks, despite the landlord having sent multiple handymen. The appliances are old and in need of replacement; only two of the stove's four burners work. Her boiler is ageing, unreliable, and driving her energy bill up. The double-glass windows are not properly sealed and let a draft into the home. A three-bedroom apartment in London is not cheap, however, and this one is only affordable for Marion because of the lack of maintenance that the landlord carries out. Even then, she needs to work two jobs to afford her rent, and this keeps her from seeing her children nearly as often as she would like. Life for Marion is a balancing act between the financial and social needs of her family.

Her current housing situation is defined as acceptable by the local authority, because each of the household's three members have their own bedroom. She is still entitled to social rented housing because of the undue economic burden private renting has placed on the household's economy, but she is not in a preferred category. This makes it very unlikely that she will be allocated a council or association vacancy, however, she has still been told by the council to bid on homes on the authority's choice-based lettings website. This is because there is an off-chance that she could gain access to a home that more preferred applicants choose not to bid on. Marion describes her feelings about bidding on houses: how she can imagine what it would be like to have the kind of choice the bidding system is obviously designed for, and what it is like knowing that, though she is going through the motions, she does not in fact have much of a chance, and probably no choice in the home she accepts. Below, she describes the frustration and despair she feels as a result of working with choice-based lettings, because she knows she will almost certainly be unable to access any of the homes she sees:

I just imagine, what would it be like to get the notification. It either all comes at once, or it doesn't come at all. Either you get all the help in the world, or they leave you completely out. How great would it be, to just be able to pick which one of these houses I want to live in? But until I get there, it's like I'm getting nowhere.

All the choice in the world is great, but you've got to get there first.

Like, for example, here I'll open the website. It lists all of these places. Imagine for a minute that I was actually high enough

on the list to be able to pick between these places; that would be great! I think that would be a lot better than how it used to be, where the council would just assign you a place and you could either say yes or no. That would actually be really good, getting to choose like that. I think that's something that this bidding thing has going for it: people who get in do get to choose their home, basically.

But you know, for the rest of us, I'm not sure how good that is. They tell me I have a chance at getting one of the less popular homes, maybe, but is that really true? I do a lot of bidding, and it gets really frustrating, always coming in low. And I have to ask myself: for me and my household, what's the point?

It was exciting at first, seeing these houses and wondering if we were going to get one. It would mean a lot to me. But that just turns to bitterness, when time and time again you don't get it. It would be great if I could, but I can't, so it's just... distressing, if that makes sense? I'm not sure why, but it's distressing. Like I go on, and see all these places, all these lovely new places, but what's the point? Someone else always gets them and it just makes me sad.

Marion is relatively tame in her criticisms of choice based lettings, compared to the remarks of other participants. Charles from Tower Hamlets was particularly effusive in his description of his borough's choice based lettings program. Charles is a single man in his mid-thirties, house-sharing with several other bachelors. Like other male participants, he is a father who's school-aged child

lives with his former partner. Although Charles calls his house “decent,” and indeed it is in a better state than many other participants’ homes, he believes it is too cramped to be hospitable for his child to stay the night. He has therefore registered with the council’s choice-based lettings scheme. Below, Charles disparages the system because he finds its very name frustratingly inaccurate:

I don’t know why they call it HomeChoice. It’s a joke, that is.

A fucking joke. There’s no choice there. Sure maybe if I was disabled or had five kids living with me, but for me? There’s no choice, no choice at all, and calling it that is an insult. It gives you hope, but the thing about that is it’s insulting, that is. I’ve got no choice, and I’ve sure got no home, so tell me what’s the point of it? Why call it that?

I can choose which flats to look at! I can choose which ones I can wish to get! But I’ve got no choice as to where I end up, leastwise not in the council’s houses, that is. It’s a joke.

If you ain’t got a place for me, fine, just tell me that. But don’t make me go through this whole song and dance! And don’t call it “HomeChoice,” for Christ’s sake. There’s no choice. No choice at all.

Charles, and other participants expressing similar, sometimes very vehement sentiments, outline one of the problems inherent in the bidding system. It is useful for those who are likely to gain a tenancy, but for those who are unlikely to gain a tenancy, it is merely frustrating and demoralising. It is here that choice-based lettings demonstrate their incompatibility with the British social housing

model. Developed in the Netherlands where there exists a universally available social rented housing marketplace with houses of varying quality, choice is a useful tool that allows applicants to indicate where in that variable marketplace they want to rent – how much they want to pay, for how nice a house. More expensive homes subsidise cheaper, lower quality homes more suitable for those of lower income. However, in the United Kingdom, social housing has always been a predominately targeted, rather than universal, form of social welfare. Vacancies are very scarce, and people who enter social housing do so not voluntarily, but because they need to. Given this, the usefulness of choice can be called into question for most applicants. Charles asks what is the purpose of making him choose a home, when he will not get his choice home? Choice-based lettings require all participants, even those very unlikely to win their place, to go through the act of choosing. When there are not enough socially rented vacancies, this indeed seems like wasted effort.

Gerald, Marion, and Charles each represent a participant with a different perspective on the implementation of choice in social rented housing allocation. Gerald will likely be benefitting from choice in a very short time frame, and so appreciates it very much. Marion will likely not benefit from it, but sees the benefit of choice to others. Charles will not benefit from it, and is greatly frustrated by the implementation of choice when it is of so little benefit to him. Amongst these three, Charles' experience is the most representative of other participants' feelings, though the words he uses to describe his experience and emotions are somewhat stronger than those chosen by others. Broadly speaking, however, many participants questioned the usefulness of choice-based lettings, when they were so

clearly unlikely to be successfully allocated a home even after all the work of bidding so frequently. Therefore, most participants recognised choice as a significant mechanism in local authority-endorsed, choice-based lettings schemes, but really questioned their usefulness to themselves as non-emergency applicants. “What’s the point?” they repeatedly asked.

The role of choice in social rented housing allocation has been the topic of some literary discussion in recent years. The findings described above have bearing on Brown and King’s (2005) paper discussing the then-growing role of choice in social rented housing via choice-based lettings. These authors argue that choice, to be considered effective choice, must be related to the capacity to act on a choice. Choice without action must be deemed ineffective. They propose that because there are so few social rented housing resources in the UK, that regardless of the mechanisms of choice that social rented housing allocation may implement, there can be no effective choice because most applicants will be literally unable to act on the choices they make. This, they argue, contrasts with the nature of the social housing system in the Netherlands, from which choice-based lettings are borrowed, where entrants to the social housing marketplace can act to implement their choices. Because of the lack of effective choice in English social rented housing, Brown and King call into question the ability of choice-based lettings to empower applicants.

The findings described above empirically demonstrate Brown and King’s arguments presented in their 2005 paper. As the authors postulated, when social rented housing applicants realised their participation in choice-based lettings was not resulting in an allocation of chosen homes, they were more frustrated by their

lack of power in the face of the apparent choices they had made. Choice without power appeared to do more harm than good. First, it caused an emotional response in participants of fear, anger and disappointment. Second, it caused participants to disengage, or want to disengage, from the social housing application process altogether. If the purpose of social rented housing is to benefit vulnerable populations in need of housing, this disengagement is undesirable. Third, it eroded the trust that should exist between beneficiaries of public goods and the institutions that administer these goods. Fourth, it encouraged ignorance in the beneficiary population by allowing or encouraging continued applications from households who were wholly unlikely to be allocated a socially rented home; these people held a false hope, and sometimes made poor housing choices in response to that false hope. In many ways, then, the research conducted here confirms the theoretical arguments made by Brown and King, and has demonstrated some of the harm done to participants by the inappropriate implementation of choice-based lettings in the United Kingdom.

They predicate their arguments on a fixed level of housing resources. That is, given a particular level of resource availability, in this case social housing vacancies, they ask whether traditional waiting lists or choice-based lettings are more appropriate. In an environment where resources are plentiful and applicants have some power to move within the system, choice-based lettings may be appropriate; in more restrictive setting such as those present in the UK, they may not be appropriate. Although this consideration is certainly relevant to the research presented here, it does not address the importance of the overall shift in the UK away from social rented housing provision, which is the catalyst for the social

housing crisis in the first place. The discussion of whether choice-based lettings is the most appropriate method for distributing the UK's social rented housing resources is therefore necessary, but not sufficient. It is also necessary to discuss the paradigmatic shift that appears to be taking place in social rented housing as a whole, which the implementation of choice-based lettings may be unintentionally masking. In fact, the shift towards choice-based lettings is one element of a broader shift towards more universal social welfare policies in UK public housing, an element which Brown and King only briefly touch upon.

Choice and Need as Scapegoats for Change

One of the most significant findings of this research has been that participating applicants to social rented housing were largely unaware of the gradual reduction of overall, social rented housing in the United Kingdom relative to the number of applicants for those homes. In short, there are fewer and fewer rented social dwellings for each applicant, year on year, which has led to a crisis in the supply of social rented housing. Significantly, participants were mostly unaware of this and only occasionally communicated it as a significant cause for their wait, which were a great deal longer than they originally expected. Though they did frequently mention that there were "not enough houses to go around," when queried as to why, they often interpreted their long wait times as a result of other causes than the supply of social lettings.

For example, as described above, participants often blamed ethnic or national groups as claiming a disproportionate number of rented social homes; native English often blamed Eastern European or South Asian migrants, while those

same migrants often blamed the English. Citizens of every ilk were likely to place blame on refugees, though as discussed above this was likely not the case. More correctly, many participants identified legislatively preferred groups as taking many vacancies, such as disabled people, homeless people, and people living under the threat of physical violence; though participants did not often postulate that if there were more homes available in the first place, there would be room for both these emergency applicants, and their own non-emergency households to be allocated rented social dwellings. Other participants suggested that hard economic times had put more people in need of social rented housing, and that this was why there were more people. But again, these individuals did not usually refer to reductions in funding of social new build as part of the crisis they experienced through abnormally long waiting times. Still other participants felt that they waited a long time because the individual housing officers assigned to them did not like them. Though this may have been the case, neither does this cause address the low supply of rented social dwellings. Broadly speaking, participants found many things to blame for their long wait time to be housed in a social rental, but only rarely did they assign blame to there being fewer dwellings available.

However, there were a few participants that did indeed identify the overall lack of social rented housing as a primary cause for their wait, and their narratives are particularly fascinating from a social welfare perspective. Carlos, a single father of two in his early thirties, gave a particularly insightful perspective. Below, he identifies that there is a problem with the supply of social rented housing in comparison to the number of people applying for it, and identifies too that this is a change from how it once was. He is one of the few participants to fully believe this.

The way I see it, things have changed. I know how it used to be, my mum and dad told me how it would go with the council, when I applied, and it just hasn't gone that way. So... things have changed. I look around and I ask myself, where are all the new council blocks?

Like, you see all the old ones everywhere – old cement buildings, like really in a bad state if you know what I mean? But still around, like. They were all built in the sixties and stuff, and there are a lot of them. They're everywhere, on every corner. Fifteen, twenty, twenty-five floors high, and like five, or ten flats on each floor. Those places are huge. I mean, how many people did they house in those? Hundreds right? How much did that cost? Probably a bomb. Yeah but a lot of them are getting knocked down now, because they're too old to fix up. But what goes up in their place? What replaced them?

Well, that's what's changed. You don't see any new council houses going up like that. Just these new apartment buildings everywhere, especially here in East London. They buy up a parking lot, and up goes a building that gets sold to bankers working in Canary Wharf. They say there's "affordable housing," but good luck with that. They're talking about shared ownership, or whatever – I don't have the income for that, sorry.

Carlos lives in Canning Town, an old industrial suburb of Newham with convenient rail access via the DLR to the twin financial capitals of the UK, Canary

Wharf and Bank. He, like so many other participants, lives with his mother in her former council flat, now let by a local housing association. It is a two-bedroom home. His mother occupies one of the bedrooms, his daughters the other, and he himself takes the living room. Luckily the flat has a somewhat spacious dining room, compared to similar homes, and this is where his interview takes place. The rest of the family is out of the home for the afternoon, his mother at work at a local grocery store, his daughters at school. Carlos himself works split shifts as a cleaner in the City, cleaning offices in the late evenings and early mornings. As such, he works in the same space as the professionals who benefit from the housing programs he goes on to describe below, that he believes are no use to him.

Yeah, shared ownership is like, you buy part of your council house from the council, or association or whatever. Like, you buy a percent. And then the council owns the rest, so you pay a mortgage and rent at the same time. But you have to be earning a certain amount to do that. And it's not a small amount, it's hard to get that kind of income together if you're not a skilled worker. Anyway the idea is you buy a little bit at first, and then a more and more, until you own the whole thing. I've looked into it, but... I can't really own a home. I don't have enough money, that's the whole reason I'm applying for social housing isn't it? I mean, a lot of my income is, like, not exactly... reported, you know?

And there's other programs out there, too, for people who are looking to buy a house. Like, below market rate, I've heard of that, but again you have to have some savings for that and I just

don't. And I've heard that they'll help you with your down payment, too, if it's your first house you're buying, but again you have to be able to buy a house – and I just can't, so what good is that to me? That's not really an option.

Carlos is then quick to make the connection between the lack of socially rented new build, and these new programs that are implemented for home ownership. Again, he is one of the few participants to make this connection.

It's kind of frustrating. Like, the council will pay for some guy's down payment, but they can't afford to build more council housing for me and my children? That doesn't seem right.

Indeed, Carlos has identified the shift in governmental resources away from social rented housing in support of targeted populations, to the provision of more universal forms of housing support to the population, in general, by way of subsidisations in support of home ownership. Resources that have been allocated towards increasing the proportion of the UK population that are owner-occupiers are fundamentally inaccessible to the vulnerable households interviewed for this research. Shared ownership schemes, as Carlos describes, require down payments and proof of income to be enrolled, and further proof of income to staircase beneficiaries to higher tiers of ownership. These down payments, and incomes, are not something that the participants of this research had access to, and therefore they were by default excluded from benefiting this program. Though shared ownership can be considered social housing by some, and is operated by both housing associations and local authorities, rather than benefiting economically

vulnerable people, it benefits middle-earners seeking easy entry into home ownership.

Likewise, Carlos mentions “affordable housing,” a catchall phrase for many similar programs that, broadly speaking, offer home ownership of flats at a below market rate. Commonly, new build developers are required by law to allocate a certain proportion of any new development to affordable housing. These units are often furnished at a lower standard, placed on the lowest floors of these apartment buildings, and sold at a reduced rate of 80% or less of market value. Critically however, they are still sold flats, again usually through a housing association, arms-length management organisation, or local authority directly. As homes for sale, they still require mortgages, and therefore a down payment as well as sufficient income on the part of the home buyer. Government-sponsored loans are also available to help new home owners obtain the funds for the down payment, itself. Particularly in London, where “below market rate” can still be considerably more than many people earn, affordable housing programs were not beneficial to the participants of this research, as several communicated.

Placing these narratives into an academic context, it appears that the United Kingdom is shifting from a targeted system of social rented housing delivery, by which the most vulnerable members of society receive an unequal advantage to compensate for their poorer off-circumstances, to a more universal approach (see Greenstein 1991 and Korpi and Palme 1998 for vigorous defences of both systems). For the participants of this research, this more universal approach is clearly not directly beneficial. What resources would have been allocated to their assistance, are instead allocated to society more broadly in support of increasing home

ownership. This shift will be discussed at some length in the conclusion to this thesis, but most critically, it is a shift which participants to this research were broadly unaware of. Rather than seeing their long waiting times as a sign that social housing resources were being diverted away from social rented housing broadly, most participants believed instead that other groups of applicants were being disproportionately allocated homes. In this way, the social rented housing allocation mechanisms of need and choice, and the apparent shift from the former to the latter, has obfuscated a larger change taking place, from targeted, social rented housing welfare to universal social housing welfare. Though this shift has likely been directly harmful to the participants of this research, they remained unaware of the shift though it clearly affected them.

It is intriguing to watch the drama between targeted social welfare and universal social welfare play out on this small scale. In the case of this research, individual social housing applicants perceived that something had been lost to them – their waiting times to be housed in a social rental had increased from within a year under previous schemes, to four to five years for their current applications. It is likely that this occurred as a result of resources being shifted away from rented, social housing new build towards increased support for owner-occupancy by government subsidisation of mortgages. On the one hand, it is likely that this more universal form of social welfare will meet with broad support, as more people will be able to access home ownership. Skocpol (1991) and Korpi (1983) argue this point, and argue further that this broader support for housing welfare can then be parlayed into greater support for everyone, including vulnerable people such as those participating in this research. Yet it is difficult to watch the participants

struggle to access a resource to which they feel entitled, and to which they would likely have had access within recent memory. Greenstein (1991) and Tullock (1983) argue that adopting a more universal approach to social housing is directly harmful to vulnerable populations, which must have their services reduced for this approach to be implemented. In the case of this research, this harm does seem to be apparent. Therefore, though the consensus-building inherent to a universal approach to social welfare is laudable, the harm caused to the participants of this research by that shift must give pause to anyone seeking to adopt a universal social welfare system in place of a targeted one. The harm to vulnerable people of doing so is, in this case at least, clear. If a targeted approach to social housing had been maintained in recent years, it is likely that many of the participants for this research would have been housed in a socially rented home by now.

The Outcome of Using Science, Technology, and Society

I attempted to use STS in this research to examine the cultural lag between expectations of and likely outcome of social rented housing applications. The roots of STS are in the technology sector, but some authors have applied STS to social institutions or concepts. I have employed this method to examine the effects of cultural lag on applicants, by examining the effect of changed allocation processes on them. This has proven valuable, because STS takes a “fresh look” at technology by interrogating what it accomplishes, rather than its advertised purpose or the purpose people believe it fulfils. This is important, because although public administration identifies transparency as a key concept public institutions should strive for, STS notes that frequently, societal technologies “go astray” from their

original or advertised purposes. When this occurs, it is helpful to examine the output of a process to examine the purpose being pursued. This is the exercise I have attempted to undertake here, and it has been very useful for examining the cultural lag that inspired this research. According to the experiences of participants, the purpose of social housing allocation is not *primarily* to meet criteria of time, choice, or even need; but to strictly *ration* a scarce resource. That is the purpose being pursued by social housing allocation, in contradiction to the advertised and generally believed purpose. The STS approach has been very useful in this context.

Conclusion for Chapter 6: Allocation Mechanisms

An examination of participants' experiences with the social rented housing allocation system has revealed several aspects of how it functions from their perspective. Some of these aspects are accurate perceptions on the part of the participants, while others are not. The three primary functions participants identified in their interviews were waiting for housing, rationing of housing, and choice in housing. In the face of continued failures to gain a rented social home, interviewees often asked the question "What's the point?" The purpose of this chapter has been to answer this question, with answers provided based on participants' experiences themselves.

Made to wait years for housing, participants almost universally expressed growing frustrations, often bordering on despair. The wait was so long, in fact, that it frequently made them want to give up on their applications as hopeless endeavours. Despite this, many recognised that waiting was a necessary element of the application process because social rented housing resources are scarce.

Participants disagreed, however, on how purposefully these long waiting periods had been implemented by local authorities. Some believed the long waiting periods were implemented with the intent to discourage people from seeking social housing, while others believed the long waits were simply a result of changing circumstances in the availability of social rented housing. Almost universally, however, participants agreed that the length of waiting periods was unanticipated by them at the time of their initial application.

Participants also recognised rationing as a primary function of social rented housing allocation systems. Almost universally, participants knew that social rented housing is a scarce resource, though they identified varying causes for this scarcity. Local authorities and housing associations must therefore implement systems to choose who is entitled to social housing, and who is not entitled. Participants disagreed, however, on how these systems worked. In reality, allocation systems give preference to disabled, homeless, overcrowded and threatened people or households. Participants did on occasion correctly communicate some of these groups as those to which preference is given. Often, however, participants either misunderstood the nature of preference given, or thought that preference was given to groups to whom preference is not given. Many participants believed that refugees and/or immigrants are allocated most social housing vacancies. Race was often introduced by participants as one explanation for there being very few rented social home available. Eastern Europeans, south Asians (Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, etc.), and white English were the most frequently cited groups to whom participants felt vacancies were being let to. Broadly speaking, it seemed that participants blamed their failed applications not on the short supply of social

rented housing and the intense rationing that must then result, but on an abundance of applicants of one category or another. Put simply, people seemed to blame or scapegoat “other” applicants, rather than the shortage of social rented housing itself.

The final function of the allocation system that participants identified was that of applicant choice in housing. Most participants were enrolled in a local authority choice-based lettings system, which applicants use to bid on newly available properties using their need to qualify. All applicants to choice-based lettings must go through this bidding process, regardless of the priority they are likely to be given in that process. For those who are high priority and are thus likely to gain a social tenancy, this is a highly beneficial process because they have a high degree of freedom in choosing a home rather than being allocated a home by the council or housing association. Those relatively few participants in such a position rated choice-based lettings highly. However, most participants were not able to benefit from this, and for these households the choice offered by choice-based lettings was only demoralising. They were required to log into a lettings system and choose homes, knowing that they in fact had no chance at gaining access to them.

This implementation of choice speaks directly to concerns in housing literature about the usefulness of choice and choice-based lettings in a scarce social rented housing environment. Brown and King (2005) argued that choice-based lettings is inappropriate in the UK because there are not enough vacancies to allow most participants to make an effective choice. They believed that this would be directly harmful to those involved, and for the participants of this research, this has indeed been so. Furthermore, the use of choice rather than time as the apparent

mechanism by which social rented housing is allocated has masked the increasing prevalence of strict rationing that is now taking place in social rented housing allocation. Participants only experience longer waiting times, and have attempted to explain these longer waiting times by blaming immigrant groups, refugees, and preferred applicants for being allocated a disproportionate number of dwellings. Few participants identified the lack of rented social dwellings as the cause for increased waiting times, nor did they connect new government programs for encouraging owner-occupancy in the middle-income group to reductions in resources dedicated to new build social lettings. The implementation of these policies represents a fundamental shift in the functioning of social housing in the United Kingdom, away from targeted housing benefits and towards universal ones. Given the apparent harm that this shift has caused to participants' ability to access social rented housing, this shift should give pause for consideration about whether the shift towards universal social housing is worth the costs. Meanwhile, the large-scale implementation of choice-based lettings seems to have obscured from participants this shift towards a universal system, and their overall ignorance of the government's reduced investment in social rented housing is one of the most significant findings of this research.

Chapter 7:

Conclusion and Policy Implications

This research set out to answer the question “how have changes to social rented housing provision and allocation in the last 30 years affected non-emergency Londoners’ experience of applying for social rented housing today?” The motivation for undertaking this research was the happenstance observation of an elderly couple in North West London who needed a larger housing association home, but were unable to access it as easily as they thought would be the case. In the end, this couple was separated because their home was too small to contain the medical equipment necessary for one partner to live independently. This story appeared to contradict the couple’s, and the researcher’s understanding of social rented housing in the United Kingdom, which at the outset of this research was thought to be the provision of housing assistance to vulnerable people. The disagreement between this perceived purpose and the functions observed was the genesis for this project. The primary purpose of this research has been to explore the nature of the conflict between people’s perceptions of how social rented housing allocation works and how it actually works, as well as to communicate the lived experiences of participants as they navigate the challenges of the current housing climate.

Research Questions and Answers

To achieve its purpose, this research has been structured around three essential research questions that arise from key literatures. These questions were:

1. Have reductions in the supply of social rented housing and changes to social rented housing allocation harmed those seeking social rented housing, and if so how?
2. What are the positive and negative aspects of rationalisation experienced by applicants to UK social rented housing today?
3. How do applicants experience the mechanisms of social rented housing allocation?

The answers to these research questions were sought by interviewing people applying for social rented housing about their experiences of the application process. To achieve this, the researcher approached a London-based, national housing association with which he was employed as a part-time researcher. This housing association allocates homes using the more traditional, waiting list technique, and it was this list which they granted access to for the purposes of this research. They provided the researcher their waiting lists consisting of several thousand individuals across the UK, from which the researcher recruited 50 participants limited to residents and applicants in London itself, where the social housing crisis is at its worst. Recruitment focused on achieving a wide sample of participant ages, boroughs of residence, and length of time spent applying. As applicants to a housing association, participants were not emergency cases. The majority also had significant experience with local authority choice-based lettings, in addition to the waiting list provided by the gatekeeper organisation.

First, this research asked the question “have reductions in the supply of social rented housing and changes to social rented housing allocation harmed those seeking social rented housing, and if so how?” This question was asked to confirm

the degree to which something had been taken from applicants to social rented housing; where once they had a chance to readily access rented social homes, this chance was no longer evident based on the researcher's anecdotal observations. Therefore it was necessary to critically explore the concept of harm, and for this literature on structural violence proved useful to frame the investigation. Structural violence was initially developed by Johan Galtung (1969), refined by Paul Farmer (1996), and has been employed by ethnographic researchers in many different contexts (see Bourgois 2002, Scheper-Hughes 2001, and Gilligan 1997). Structural violence seeks to connect the experiences of individuals to the global changes that influence them using narrative, history, and geography. By taking a historical approach to the development of the modern changes to social housing, and demonstrating how these changes harm the participants of this research in subtle ways, this project has ascribed to a structural violence approach.

Participants indicated two broad categories of harm: harm from poor living conditions, including being overcrowded, struggling to have a good family life, and living in low quality housing; and harm from inappropriate allocation processes, primarily from having to wait too long for social rented housing, being a burden on friends and family, or not being recognised as being in significant need. These issues were discussed in chapters 4 and 5, respectively. In keeping with the structural violence approach, these forms of harm were placed into a historical context that seeks to identify what societal developments have driven these problems. At the same time, many participants engaged in self-sabotage or self-harm by making poor housing decisions even when armed with all of the facts and the power to make more appropriate decisions. Therefore although it did appear that a significant deal

of structural violence was taking place against the participants of this research, as evidenced by their inability to meet basic needs as a result of institutional withdrawal, it is also fair to say they harmed themselves to a significant degree. This speaks to a debate within the structural violence field, as to whether or not structural violence is capable of encapsulating all aspects of individual narrative because of its focus on systemic inequities (Wacquant 2004). This thesis has found this to be the case; historical context was not sufficient for explaining individual failures. Even so, structural violence has still been useful for giving historical context to the problems described in participant narrative, where such narrative was appropriate, which was frequent within this research.

Second, this research asked the question “what are the positive and negative aspects of rationalisation experienced by applicants to UK social rented housing today?” This question was asked because there is significant social housing literature that calls into question the value of rationalisation in a public institution, such as social rented housing, and significant literature that establish the value of rationalisation. At the same time as this literary debate, the researcher had observed specific anecdotal instances of both employee and applicant critiques of rational systems implemented in social rented housing allocation. The question of whether rationalisation is useful in public institutions seemed relevant, given the increasingly central role of points-based assessments of need in social rented housing allocations, a very much rationalised approach that stands in contrast to previous systems. To give a proper assessment of rationalisation in social housing, this research has consulted public administration literature to identify the positive and negative aspects of rationalisation in governmental institutions, and queried

participants to assess which of these benefits and detriments were present in their experiences with social housing organisations.

Participants communicated that there were indeed benefits and detriments to the rationalisation of social rented housing allocation, as they experienced it. The three most commonly cited benefits of rationalisation were objectivity, indicating that most individuals felt that housing officers were not able to make allocation decisions based on irrelevant factors such as race or personality; consistency when working within the same organisation, indicating that the result of their applications were predictable according to a set of universal rules though many declared that there was little consistency between different housing organisations; and finally, transparency, indicating that they felt that the organisations made information on the allocation process easily available to them though other participants believed organisations to be opaque. This transparency/opacity divide seemed to rely on the individual housing officer with whom participants dealt with. Participants also specified three primary detriments to their rational treatment within social rented housing allocation: over-rationalisation, meaning that their specific conditions and needs were being too much quantified, and therefore not perceived as needs at all; dehumanisation, by which participants came to feel as though they were part of a housing machine; and self-advancement, wherein participants indicated that housing organisations were employing non-interactive allocation methods to reduce their monetary investment, reducing the quality of service to clients to better protect their own organisations financially.

Third, this research asked “what is the intended purpose of the mechanisms of social housing allocation?” This question was asked to identify, from an

applicant's perspective, how social housing allocations function today. After a literature review of recent developments in the social rented housing sector with respect to choice-based lettings and reduced investment in new, social rented housing, it appeared that social housing allocation had gone through some significant changes. If one thinks of social housing allocation as a series of technologies designed to accomplish the goal of allocating social housing, one can use the tools of STS to analyse the operations of that machine. This research question sought to execute this by identifying the operating mechanisms in the allocation systems as they were experienced by applicants moving through it, and to assess how changes to this system over previous decades has impacted these individuals. This was to address the idea of "cultural lag," whereby participant experiences seemed to deviate sharply from participant expectations of social housing allocation. Examining social housing allocations as a technology allows a fresh perspective on the direction it is heading, independent of previously held, societal expectations.

Participants identified three key functions of the social housing allocation systems that they experience today. The first function was waiting. Individuals normally reported having waited between one year and two years to be housed in a rented social home, and this was a much longer time than they had anticipated. Some participants felt that this long wait had been implemented as a purposeful strategy to convince applicants to give up on their housing application, thereby reducing the numerical burden on housing organisations. The second function identified was rationing. Participants indicated an awareness that social rented housing was apparently scarce, and that one of the primary operations of housing

organisations was to implement a system of deciding to whom vacancies would be allocated. One of the most significant findings of this research has been that very few participants had a comprehensive knowledge of the allocation policies of the organisations to which they were applying. Many participants blamed ethnic, national, or refugee groups on the social housing crisis, though this is arguably not the case. The third function identified by participants was choice. Individuals indicated that, for those with significant enough need to be housed in short order, choice-based lettings allowed them to choose which home they wanted to come to occupy from among many. However, the majority of participants were only frustrated and demoralised by choice-based lettings because though the bidding process allows and requires them to choose homes, they have no power to execute that choice and therefore it is not effective but illusory choice.

This finding supports the argument by Brown and King (2005) that choice-based lettings are likely inappropriate in the rationed, social rented housing environment of the United Kingdom. However, the implementation of false choice and extreme rationing both appear to scapegoat a larger shift in UK social housing away from a targeted system of social welfare (Greenstein 1991 and Tullock 1983) and towards a more universal approach (see Skocpol 1991 and Korpi 1983). The apparent shift in social rented housing from a more broadly available model to a more targeted one that serves emergency cases only is discussed, in particular, in Fitzpatrick and Pawson (2014), as well as the increasingly temporary nature of social rented accommodation.

Participants experienced these changes as greatly lengthened wait times, and as described above attributed that condition to an influx of “others” taking up a

disproportionate number of vacancies. However, a few also identified the overall lack of housing as their key problem, and evidenced this by referring to the physical environment and the relative lack of new council blocks being constructed.

Affordable housing such as shared ownership, first-time buyer, and below market rate offerings – oriented towards increasing owner-occupancy – were not accessible to the participants of this research because their incomes were too low or they had insufficient savings to purchase a home, subsidised though it may be.

Limitations of Research

This research is limited in several ways. Some of these limitations were by design, primarily around scope of research. Others represent failures to achieve initial goals. Still others represent failures in initial design that would be done differently if this research were to be carried out again. Each of these will be discussed below.

The first limitation of this research is the scope of participants interviewed. At an early stage of project planning, the researcher decided to limit the scope of interviewees to only recruit participants that both lived in London and were applying for social rented housing within London. This decision was made for two reasons: first, the social housing crisis is at its worst in London, where there are more applicants and fewer rented social vacancies than anywhere else in the UK. Furthermore, the broader housing crisis is also at its worst in London. There are fewer dwellings available for private sale and rent, therefore the private market serves as a poorer auxiliary to the social one. It is thus here that social rented housing is most necessary, but least available, and therefore the most interesting

place to study for the purposes of this project. The second reason London was chosen as the site for data collection was logistical. The researcher lived and worked in London, with a gatekeeper organisation with significant housing stock in London. This minimised the travel time necessary to carry out this research.

The focus on London has ramifications for how this research can be extended to other geographies. The scarcity of social housing in London is rarely matched anywhere else within the UK. Outside of London and the south east of England, social housing is considerably less scarce and private rental and home ownership is significantly more affordable. For this reason, the living conditions and other difficulties experienced by participants of this research may not be problematic for participants outside of the selected geography. It would be interesting to extend this research project to include areas with relatively high social rented housing supply and more affordable private housing markets, as a comparative study.

The second limitation of scope inherent to this research is the decision to limit participants to *non-emergency applicants* to social rented housing. This resulted from the data available to the researcher during project design. As an employee of the gatekeeper organisation, a housing association, the researcher was able to gain access to the waiting list with relative ease. By definition, the households on this waiting list were non-emergency cases because emergency cases are housed by the local authority, who collaborates with housing associations only if necessary. The list of people to whom the researcher had access for this research were therefore all classified as non-emergency applicants. Initially, this was thought to be a disadvantage of the research because emergency applicants

seemed like a more interesting research topic; however, as data was collected and as has been communicated in this thesis, unique insights have arisen as a result of this limitation in scope to non-emergency applicants.

Still, the focus on non-emergency applicants has eliminated many households from being considered for this research. This thesis has focused on the harm caused to non-emergency applicants by changes to the rules of social housing allocation, yet it is entirely possible that these same changes have been beneficial to emergency applicants. For example, it has already been identified that choice-based lettings may be very effective for those participants expressing high need, which emergency applicants do. Another interesting extension of this research would therefore be to assess emergency applicants' experiences of social housing allocation, to identify if recent changes have indeed been beneficial for them.

The third limitation of scope in this research arises from a failure on the part of the researcher to secure significant enough participation from interviewees in the boroughs of London which this research intended to focus on. Initially, this research had sought to acquire enough participants from the boroughs of Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Islington, Greenwich, and Hammersmith and Fulham to identify themes specific to these boroughs. However, participation in these boroughs was insufficient to meet other recruitment criteria, including even distributions of age and time spent waiting among participants. Because the researcher had identified these other factors as more important to this research than specific borough of residence, this ambition to identify borough-specific themes of experience was abandoned in favour of achieving a more even distribution of participants by age and time spent waiting. This allowed the researcher to obtain more participants

from older demographics, yet prevents an effective analysis of individual boroughs because there are not enough participants of any single borough to carry out a focused analysis specific to that borough.

The most significant failure of this research, however, has been a lack of treatment on the topic of housing benefit from the perspective of applicants to social rented housing. Housing benefit is a form of social housing that supplements beneficiary's income by paying part or all of their rent with government money. Though the researcher did investigate participants' housing histories to a significant extent, he did not specifically call out housing benefit as a resource participants might be accessing. In retrospect, the researcher should have asked each participant if they were on housing benefit. As it stands, no participants indicated of their own volition that they were in receipt of housing benefit, but there appeared to be several that could benefit significantly from it. This is a failure on the part of this research. Information on how many of the participants presented here were in receipt of housing benefit would have added to the quality of the data, and it is regrettable that this is not available.

If I had the opportunity to continue work in this field, amongst the supplemental research described above, I would choose to carry out an investigation of emergency applicants' experiences with social housing allocation that could be compared to the findings of this research. This thesis has concluded that resources are being withdrawn from non-emergency applicants, worsening their experience of social housing allocation and reducing their likelihood for a successful application to social rented housing. Identifying if these siphoned resources were being put to good use elsewhere, or if instead changes to social

housing allocation were equally harmful to emergency applicants, would be a meaningful endeavour.

Finally, having engaged with this topic in a qualitative manner and found that to be a useful approach, I would like to engage in future such projects using a more ethnographic method. I believe it would be an incredibly interesting and valuable piece of research, to follow a few of the failed applicants observed in this research for many years, to observe their ongoing – rather than acute – housing struggles. Lending to the research here a more longitudinal study, as is truly observed in structural violence research which usually takes place over many years, would be very interesting. Future studies undertaken by myself in this vein will likely be more ethnographic in nature; I really felt that I did not have enough time with participants to capture their entire stories. Though this would not have been possible within the time frame of my doctoral studies, it is something I would really look forward to in the future.

Unique Contributions

Amongst the findings described above, a few themes were particularly unique or impactful. This research has sought to make original contributions to academic literature in housing studies in three ways: first, by exploring the effects of reducing social rented housing stock on the lived conditions of applicants to social rented housing; second, by identifying key differences between the functioning of social housing allocation and applicants' beliefs about this functioning; and third, by assessing the specific appropriateness of choice-based letting schemes in the United Kingdom from the perspective of non-emergency

applicants to social rented housing. The five most important take-aways of this research are described below, and correlate closely to these unique contributions. These perspectives were shared by nearly every participant of this research despite their generational and geographical differences.

First, although housing studies does argue for the necessity of social housing as a preventative measure against the ills of poverty and other disadvantageous condition (see Martin et al 1987, Taylor et al 1997, and Pevalin et al 2008), the arguments for more social rented housing are often phrased quantitatively through an assessment of social rented housing supply and demand, or demographics of usership (see, for example, Dorling 2014 or Forrest and Murie 1983). Relatively few pieces of housing literature go into qualitative depth on the experience of applicants to social rented housing, particularly since the implementation of choice-based lettings. It is one thing to read about the effects of the lack of social rented housing, and an entirely different thing to observe the struggles of applicants from a first-hand perspective. One aim of this research has been to acquire these narratives so that they can be broadcast to a wider audience. Participants were almost universally overcrowded, overworked, and/or living in poor conditions because they were not able to acquire good housing absent government assistance. Are we, as a society, willing to allow these disadvantaged groups to continue to struggle so? It is a moral and political question, but one that should be asked from an informed perspective about what these challenges are. This thesis has sought to provide some of this information by first-hand narrative. The struggles presented within this thesis are very real and present.

Second, many participants expressed that after applying to social rented housing, they felt that somethings had literally been taken from them: their chance at accessing social rented housing. Whether they were older participants who had applied for social rented housing in the past, or younger participants who had heard from older family or friends that social rented housing was easily accessible, they found that it was not easily accessible. This, to them, represented a robbery of some kind. A resource to which they once would have had access, they no longer did; they therefore felt deprived or robbed of some tangible thing. Few participants were able to communicate why social rented housing was no longer accessible, but they certainly felt that it was so. This speaks to one of the most fundamental signs that structural violence has taken place against an individual, according to Farmer's (1996) definition: when people have lost something critical to their continued quality of life, but are unable to explain who or what has done this.

Third, this research has uncovered significant frustration of participants at inconsistencies between housing application and allocation policies within different housing organisations. Amongst the 50 participants for this research, only a handful demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the allocation policies of multiple organisations. Most participants considered one housing organisation as their primary gateway into social rented housing, and refused to thoroughly explore options outside of this single entity despite knowing that there were many other social housing organisations available to them. Participants cited the time investment necessary to do this as the primary cause for this hesitancy, arguing that each housing organisation had its own application process and set of rules they went by. This frustrated participants considerably, and led to many refusing to work

with multiple organisations. This speaks significantly to literatures about effective governance; public institutions, according to Weber, should be transparent and easy to navigate, so that assistance can be rendered to those for whom assistance is intended. The refusal to work within established systems because of the manual challenge is a telling sign that the way we have organised social housing is not presently operating well.

Fourth, participants were broadly ignorant of social rented housing allocation policies. They frequently understood that waiting time, need for housing, and choice all played a role in how a housing organisation decides to allocate vacancies, but were rarely able to communicate how exactly this happened from an operational perspective. Not only were they often ignorant of the actual operating procedures, but they frequently held completely incorrect beliefs about how social housing allocation works both generally and in the specific case of the organisation to which they applied. Participants often scapegoated immigrant, ethnic, national and refugee groups for the failure of their own social rented housing application, when a clear reading of allocation policies would clarify that these groups are likely not responsible for the shortage of social rented housing. The ignorance demonstrated by participants to this research was truly troubling, because as Weber claims, institutions should be transparent. That so few participants had comprehensive understanding of them indicates that they are likely not transparent enough.

Finally, participants were demoralised by the lack of effective choice provided by choice-based lettings. Every London local authority allocates its social vacancies through a choice-based lettings scheme, which means that for a social

housing applicant in London to access council housing they must go through the choice-based lettings process. For the participants of this research this was an actively painful process because their bids ranked so low. Most participants did not exceed #40 on the bid lists, which placed them years away from being housed by the council. However, they still logged in each week to make new bids because they had been informed it was still possible for them to be housed. Each week, therefore, was a fresh reminder that although they believed themselves to be in desperate need for housing, local government did not see their need as nearly pressing enough. Participants left the choice-based system feeling demoralised, dehumanised, and unseen. Disengagement soon followed.

Theoretical Considerations and Outcomes

As has been discussed, this thesis has taken an unorthodox approach in developing a methodology from three distinct fields: structural violence, public administration, and science, technology and society (STS). The primary methodology followed in this research is one of structural violence, by which individuals' experiences of deprivation are examined at a very fine level but related to macro-level forces that enact violence on them. As such, the data gathered was by qualitative interview, semi-structured around themes raised in the literature review. To bolster this approach at the institutional level and provide a metric against which social housing organisations can be measured on the basis of participant experience, public administration literature has been consulted. Using the work of Max Weber in particular, the "performance" of these institutions has been assessed in a systematic manner that was not possible using structural

violence. However, one of the most pressing concerns in this work has been the idea of “cultural lag” between the perceived functioning and actual functioning of social rented housing allocation in the UK, and public administration seemed to leave this idea somewhat underdeveloped. To examine the effects of this cultural lag specifically, therefore, STS was considered because of the emphasis within one field of STS on examining the output of technology to identify the purpose of that technology. Interpreting participant narratives using this approach indicated that the purpose of current social rented housing allocations is to strictly ration social rented housing stock, although this disagrees significantly with the advertised purpose of social rented housing.

Each of these distinct bodies of work have contributed to this research in a particular way and brought different strengths to bear in examining aspects of participant narrative. Although this combination is unorthodox, I hope that in this thesis it has been shown that my approach has yielded interesting results. With this in mind, I would now like to turn to the broader meaning of my findings, as well as the policy implications that I believe they have.

In addition to demonstrating the usefulness of the above fields within housing studies, this research has attempted to make a unique contribution to the field of housing studies. In particular, this investigation has been undertaken as a follow up to Brown and King’s examinations of changing social rented housing allocation methods and the effect of these changes on the lives of applicants to social housing. In 2005, Brown and King wrote that choice-based letting’s apparent implementation of choice might be obscuring the greater effect of scarcity in social rented housing. In 2014, Fitzpatrick and Pawson wrote that secure housing tenure

might be ending in favour of “ambulance service” social housing that is very targeted at certain, defined emergency applicants only. This research has occurred in these veins, and seeks to confirm the arguments of Brown and King (2005) and Fitzpatrick and Pawson (2014). It appears that social rented housing is headed down an increasingly targeted track, but troublingly, applicants to social rented housing seem unaware of this shift in policy. In the meantime, they live in conditions that concepts of the welfare state should find disturbing.

Another theoretical consideration that this work has examined is the idea of the street level bureaucrat as described by Lipsky (2010) and Alden (2015a and 2015b). When social service resources are scarce, it is likely that bureaucrats at the point of service delivery will limit the distribution of that resource according to potentially arbitrary rules, resulting in an uneven distribution of services. This was observed in this research, as participant narratives differed considerably depending on the social housing organisation, and individual housing officer, participants worked with during their social rented housing application process.

Broader Meaning

The narratives given by participants to this research indicate that there is a portion of the UK population, once served by social rented housing, from which this service is being slowly withdrawn. What once was provided to them is no longer so. By broadening the perspective of this withdrawal to include the distribution of public money into the housing industry, as a whole, one can view this not as a withdrawal, but as a reallocation of resources from one goal to another. Just as resources are being taken from social rented housing, as seems to be the case for

the participants interviewed for this research, resources are being invested elsewhere: into increasing owner-occupancy in the more affluent, private rental group. Though only a few participants spoke about this shift directly, the findings of this research are clearly relevant to this change. Even as social, rented new build continues to dwindle, new affordable housing units are built daily. For the participants of this research, this is significantly detrimental because they are unable to access this affordable housing, because it is still out of their price range – for renting, or for ownership.

Some people in the UK must be housed by government as a statutory requirement; these people are homeless, living under the threat of violence, are medically disabled in particular ways, or are overcrowded by the most conservative standard. However, social rented housing has historically been available to a broader spectrum of people than just these legally preferred groups. Since the end of the Second World War through the 80s, social housing was widely available to lower class households as a form of targeted social welfare. By demonstrating an inability to find affordable, decent housing, these households could access social rented housing as a form of state assistance to achieve a minimum quality of life. For the participants of this research, this has proven to no longer be the case. For this reason, it is fair to say that this form of targeted welfare has been greatly reduced in recent decades.

At the same time, other, more universal forms of housing are expanding. Many local authorities mandate that new residential developments consist of a certain proportion of “affordable housing,” usually interpreted as below-market rate housing units sold and managed by housing associations, made available for

purchase or rent. Likewise, first-time buyer mortgage assistance can help individuals who have not purchased a home before to do so, by loaning them government funds to help them make a down payment on a first home. Finally, shared ownership schemes allow beneficiaries to purchase a percentage of a housing organisation flat, offering another way for people to move into owner-occupancy. Each of these efforts requires state resources to fund and administrate, resources that could go to additional social rented housing but is instead being diverted towards owner-occupancy for a more numerous, and more affluent group. These social housing programs are likely to enjoy broader support amongst the populace, and this can indeed be parlayed into broader support for social housing in general; but in the short term, the harm done to participants of this research by this reallocation of resources away from social rented housing cannot be denied.

Most troubling of all, the shift away from targeted assistance to non-emergency applicants is something that participants to this research were broadly unaware of. Though they experienced longer waiting times to be housed, they interpreted this as being caused by other groups securing a disproportionate number of vacancies rather than as a shortage in social rented housing resulting from systemic lack of investment. For this reason, and possibly just because of blind optimism, most interviewees persisted with their social rented housing applications believing that they would eventually be successful. In short, they still believed social rented housing would work for them.

Arguably, this will not be the case. As the number of applicants for social rented housing vacancies continues to grow and resources invested in social rented housing continue to diminish – two patterns that are unlikely to reverse given the

Conservative government's recent moves to reduce social housing rents – the crisis of social rented housing supply will likely worsen further. While new vacancies dwindle, rented social homes will become more rationed and homes will be allocated to an increasingly narrow, targeted population of emergency cases only. As the participants wait in line for social rented housing, an increasing number of emergency applicants will continue to jump the queue, effectively moving these participants farther and farther from the front. Rather than moving their applications forward by waiting, then, they will be moving backwards, though they may be unaware of it.

Participants' awareness of the dire status of their social rented housing applications appears to be largely obscured by the broad implementation of choice-based lettings by local authorities and the largest housing associations. Each time a household bids on a vacant social letting in a choice-based lettings scheme, they are given a different ranking of need relative to other bidders. This makes it difficult for households to track their forward, or backward, progress. Participant confusion was further exacerbated when housing officers informed participants that they should keep bidding because they might "get lucky" and win a bid for a home for which other, more qualified applicants do not bid. Likewise, applying to many different housing organisations, rather than one as in the past, has been further confusing. In short it seems to have become harder for applicants to be aware of the likelihood of their success, while at the same time the likelihood for that success seems to be diminishing.

The effect of this sequence of events on the population interviewed for this research is twofold. First, their continued failure to access decent and affordable

housing via social rented housing has meant that they must continue to live in poor quality housing or under otherwise undesirable conditions, for the time being. They must continue to be overcrowded, overworked, a burden on their friends and family, and/or unable to lead a fulfilling family life, often while living in low quality accommodation.

Second and more insidious, they remain unaware that social rented housing is unlikely to be a resource that they will have access to. This leads them to continue living in the above conditions while they wait for their applications to be approved, when they might be better served by pursuing other housing, work and life options which they might have done, had they thought their current conditions to be other than temporary.

Policy Implications

In conclusion, this thesis recommends three broad policy changes that arise from the observations described above.

First, we should consider carefully whether we want to reduce our investment of resources into social rented housing that is targeted towards non-emergency applicants. Though the provision of social rented housing to emergency applicants is more difficult to dispute, the provision to non-emergency applicants is often nearly as impactful. Where do we draw the line between an emergency case, and a non-emergency case? Is it an emergency when a single mother must work 70 hours per week at two menial jobs to afford a decent home for her children? Under the current rules for social rented housing, it is not classified as an emergency, and because there are so few vacancies it is unlikely that she will receive assistance in

the form of social rented housing. Is it an emergency when a nuclear family of four must move in with the grandparents because rent is too high, overcrowding a two-bedroom home? Again no. These non-emergencies are not problematic if we maintain enough social rented housing stock to allocate homes to non-emergency cases, but developments in recent decades have continued to erode this form of tenure. Based on the severity of harmful living conditions observed during this research, this thesis would argue that increased investment in targeted, social rented housing for non-emergency cases is certainly necessary, if we are to prevent more people from living like the participants of this research live. Ideally this would take the form of increased construction of flats dedicated to social rent. Social rented housing in the UK is moving from a broad system of support for lower income families towards a safety net for the very worst off. We should reverse this pattern, to ensure that all individuals have access to decent housing provided by the government, if need be.

However, if investment in social rental properties is to continue to decline, then so be it -- but we should be conscious that this is the road we are going down. As it stands now, the participants of this research at least were not aware of this. The second policy recommendation of this research is therefore to re-examine the way social rented housing and social housing allocation is marketed to the public. The single overriding theme that has been present throughout almost every narrative in this research is that participants remain ignorant of the full extent to changes in social rented housing availability and allocation. If we are to decide to reduce the amount of social rented housing to a level that is only available to emergency cases, as seems to be increasingly the case, then this change should be

communicated clearly to applicants and the public in general, from every angle. Choice-based lettings is a misleading name; it implies that applicants will have a significant degree of choice when in fact they will have very little. Choice-based lettings should therefore be rebranded. Housing officers across many organisations should be uniformly trained in how to communicate to non-emergency applicants the likely failure of their applications. Organisation and central government websites should accurately reflect the same information in a manner that is easy to access and understand. The government does not currently offer any guidance as to the educational requirements placed upon the organisations that provide social rented housing, whether they are local authorities, arms-length management organisations, or housing associations. As such, each individual organisation develops its own internal policies on how to engage with applicants. Participants indicated that this guidance varied significantly in content and effectiveness, yet if we are to deny services to these people we must consistently and reliably communicate that to them. As it stands now, many were unaware that they were being denied services, a situation that should not be allowed to continue.

Though the current lack of communication works in the interest of housing organisations because they do not deal with the many people seeking, but unlikely to be allocated social rented housing, it is really against those people's interest to not effectively communicate the poor chances they have at accessing social rented housing. To allow these people to continue living with false hope is unethical, and has been observed to lead them to make poor housing decisions. Some participants of this research were seen to continue to live with parents, friends or family for

years under the assumption that they would soon be housed, when this was likely not the case.

Third, if we are to supply social rented housing only to emergency applicants, we should consider making the exclusion of non-emergency applicants explicitly part of the housing allocation process, rather than an implicit one as it is now. Perhaps the ultimate form of false advertising, participants to this research assumed that simply because they could apply for social rented housing, they had a chance at accessing it. Both choice-based lettings and waiting lists misled participants in this respect, because need trumps both choice and time in the allocation of social rented housing in the UK. Again, participants were unaware of this and were left to their own devices to ascertain that they had little or no chance at gaining a rented social property. If, by the rationing functions of the allocation system and its preference for emergency applicants, non-emergency applicants are effectively excluded from social rented housing, then this exclusion should be as obvious as possible. There can be no more obvious way than excluding them from applying in the first place; it is the clearest form of communication possible, therefore this should be the method chosen to notify them.

In final summary, the position that this thesis takes is that we should provide more social rented housing than we currently do. The harm caused by not doing so is, for the participants to this research, clear. Failing that, we should communicate the withdrawal of these resources to the public and most importantly to social rented housing applicants themselves, and officially exclude non-emergency applicants from receiving social housing assistance. These measures will better inform non-emergency applicants that they can no longer expect assistance

in the form of social rented housing. Reorienting the public perception about the role of social rented housing in the UK is our most important task, if we are to cease providing that critical resource to the vulnerable people interviewed for this research, and others like them.

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