

# 11 Researching territorial stigma with social housing tenants

## Tenant-led digital media production about people and place

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### Introduction

This chapter considers how social housing tenants produce digital countercultural products to talk about, represent and analyse people and place relationships, and particularly how they used these products to explore territorialised representations of poverty and class. We draw on three examples from the *Residents' Voices – Advantage, Disadvantage, Community and Place* project (hereafter Residents' Voices): (1) digital story telling disseminated through a website; (2) tenant-driven media analysis of the popular Australian television parody 'Housos'; and (3) a short dramatic film written and directed by social housing tenants. Each example uses digital media production to represent, and perhaps even challenge, territorial stigma, but represents social housing tenants and their neighbourhoods in different ways. The aim is to expose the methodological challenges within each digital cultural production process in relation to representations of territorial stigma. Bourdieu (1986) has shown how social order is inscribed through 'cultural products'. These products include education, language and the media. Cultural products work through framing and reworking alliances over culture both symbolically and materially. This leads to an unconscious sense of acceptance of social differences and one's place in society both in a social/cultural and geographical/spatial sense. In other words, through these cultural products meanings are attached to certain practices, places and events and these meanings are internalised even by those who themselves are being culturally defined.

Goffman's (1986) seminal work on stigma grouped the concept into the three categories of abominations of the body, blemishes of individual character, and tribal stigma (race, nation, and religion). From Goffman's perspective stigma arises through negative labelling and stereotyping of people who are depicted as possessing discrediting attributes, which leads to a 'spoiled identity'. Wacquant (2007) argues that a key omission in Goffman's (1986) thesis is a link to 'blemish of place' or a discredited neighbourhood reputation, which leads to what he terms 'territorial stigma'. From this perspective analogous to the situation of tribal stigma, territorial stigma can project a virtual social identity on families and individuals living in particular neighbourhoods and thus deprive them

of acceptance from others. Place and person become intertwined in negative representations although these may well conflict with tenants' own realities. Consequently, 'blemish of place' can add an additional layer of disadvantage to any existing stigma that is associated with people's poverty, culture, or ethnic origins. In this way, others, often outsiders, construct the community identity, and therefore stigma is associated not just with individual persons but also with the geographical spaces in which they live.

The consequences of 'territorial stigma' include, but are certainly not limited to: discrimination by employers on the basis of postcode, address, or other spatial markers (Bradbury and Chalmers, 2003; Ziersch and Arthurson, 2005); changes to the nature and quality of service provision (Hastings, 2009; Pawson *et al.*, 2015); the disposal of social housing to the private market so as to disperse stigmatised neighbourhoods resulting in reduction of social housing stock (Darcy and Rogers, 2015; Rogers and Darcy, 2014); and impacts on residents' health and well-being and mental health in particular (Dufty(-Jones), 2009; Kelaher *et al.*, 2010). In Australia, Warr (2005) draws particular attention to the role of television and other media whose 'negative . . . attention amplifies and cements the quotidian prejudices that are experienced by people living in 'discredited' neighbourhoods'. Warr (2005) concludes that, while global economic forces and government policy intervention are important mediators of territorial stigma, the 'unwarranted and unsympathetic attitudes and actions of outsiders . . . are key contributors to the difficulties of those living in stigmatised neighbourhoods' (p. 19).

Indeed, digital media is a key medium through which distinctions of class and territorial stigma are shaped, imposed and reproduced. Television and other digital media are easily accessible through 24-hour Internet, so its realm is pervasive. In Australia, as elsewhere (Arthurson *et al.*, 2014; Devereux *et al.*, 2011; Hastings and Dean, 2003; Warr, 2005) scholars have shown that:

The media has played an active role in supporting and embellishing pathological depictions of social housing estates as sites of disorder and crime, drawing on explanations that cite individual agency and behaviour as the problems.

(Arthurson, 2012, p. 101)

Stressed urban communities are frequently sought out by the media to set 'nightmarish portrayals of urban life' that may serve or extend negative stereotypes. In the end it matters little if these localities in fact are, or are not, run down and dangerous places, and their populations comprised essentially of minorities and poor people, 'the prejudicial belief that they are suffices to set off socially noxious consequences' (Wacquant, 2008, p. 239).

It is a mistake, however, to view 'the media' as solely responsible for the representations of people and place they produce. For example, the television shows that are sometimes referred to as 'poverty porn' (Jensen, 2014), which include alarmingly exaggerated and often territorialised portrayals of poverty, are the

product of complex cultural production processes that draw together different narratives about people and place. Warr (2016) identifies at least three symbiotic components to this complex cultural production process: poverty news, poverty stories and poverty research (i.e. research data about poverty). Social researchers and the organisations that fund their research are not separate from the media's cultural production of stories or news about people and place. Rather, the research process and research data *itself* are cultural products. For example, the latest release of unemployment statistics for a particular low-income suburb might contribute to the production of news stories about poor places and people, as well as other, at times more problematic, televised dramatic portrayals. It is often the case that researchers who are working with social housing communities are required to recount and construct these familiar narratives about low-income people and places to secure research funding. These funding narratives require researchers to focus on deficits, and researchers – much like journalists and television producers – regularly cite demographic features, such as high levels of unemployment and incarceration, or low average incomes for a suburb, as evidence of people and place poverty and, therefore, as a rationale for research funding. Thus, methodologies that create the type of data, which contributes to territorial stigma, might be more likely to secure grants and other funding success than those deployed in attempt to challenge the construction of categories through which territorial stigma narratives are produced. The latter, we argue, should be a key concern for housing and urban scholars. Slater's (2014, p. 955) scholarship is, therefore, refreshingly critical, arguing this type of research provides 'the evidence base' that appeases funding bodies while 'buffering politicians and their audiences from viable alternatives and inoculating them against the critique of autonomous scholarship'.

Research from Australia, in addition to international studies, explores the disjunct that often exists between media representations of social housing estates and the lived experience of tenants (Hastings, 2004; Arthurson *et al.*, 2014; Wacquant, 2007). Lapeyronnie (2008), for instance, identified the tension between internal self-perceptions of the French *banlieue* experience and external images. Similarly, the often-cited suite of research that represents estates, for example, by way of unemployment, income status, school retention and crime rates, may be poorly aligned with the reported lived experience of tenants. Residents of stigmatised places bemoan the fact that researchers, housing authorities and the media, and particularly news and current affairs programs, stigmatise their neighbourhoods and occupants, often without even having visited the area or knowing the people (Lapeyronnie, 2008). An alternative standpoint is that mainstream media and academia can be recruited to challenge negative perceptions of estates (Jacobs *et al.*, 2011; Hastings and Dean, 2003). In a time of sensationalist and xenophobic media discourse, and under highly rationalist research funding schemas that position 'objective' quantitative research data as more valid than 'subjective' qualitative research data, this can be hard to achieve in practice. Recording the subjective experiences of tenants is important, because acceptance of the negative stereotype invalidates the legitimacy of any claims upon place making by

social tenants in identified ‘poor’ urban areas. These negative stereotypes can be, and often are deployed to legitimise redevelopment of such areas through forced relocation and disposal of public assets (Darcy and Rogers, 2015). Current urban studies debates offer limited engagement with micro-scale analyses of the ‘creative destruction’ of estates, or, alternatively, with the ‘creative potential’ of local communities and social tenants themselves who are typically viewed as either passive beneficiaries or victims of redevelopment. Researchers need to pay more attention to the cultural production and intersection of the narratives about social housing tenants and estates, across a broader range of discursive modalities.

### **Residents’ Voices project and collaborative research with tenants**

Faced with threats of the demolition and redevelopment of their dwellings, dispersal of tenants and communities (Darcy and Rogers, 2015), and with persistent stigmatisation and demonisation in mainstream media (Arthurson *et al.*, 2014; Jacobs *et al.*, 2011; Wacquant, 2008), some of the tenants of social housing that we have been working with as part of Residents’ Voices in Australia have used video and other digital media to create alternative cultural products. Residents’ Voices was a four-year project that was funded by the Australian Research Council, St Vincent de Paul Society, Western Sydney University and Loyola University Chicago. The aim of Residents’ Voices was to collaborate with tenants to challenge conventional outsider approaches to understanding place and disadvantage by facilitating the emergence and validation of situated knowledge and ‘insider’ theorising about this relationship. Residents’ Voices was broadly guided by action research and digital media production (see Rogers *et al.*, 2012).

Although participatory research has become increasingly common, particularly following the crisis of classic anthropology with its emphasis on outsider knowledge production, the actual role of participants in studies varies greatly. Biggs (1989, cited in Rowe, 2006) suggests four levels of participation: ‘contractual’ (researchers contract for services from local people); ‘consultative’ (local people are asked for their opinions or advice about the research); ‘collaborative’ (researchers and local people work together on a study that is designed, initiated and managed by institutional researchers); and ‘collegiate’. In our *collegiate participatory research*, the academics and tenants worked together as colleagues for mutual learning and to develop a system for independent research among local people. Collegiate participation presents the greatest challenge to the university sector which views itself as the holder of expert knowledge. Nevertheless, Residents’ Voices aimed for the collegiate approach and the full determination and active involvement in management of the knowledge production process by the lay tenant researchers. Significantly, beyond the local collegiate approach, Residents’ Voices was concerned with the sharing of experiences, reflections and understanding, and most particularly the learning and new knowledge produced at the *intersections of local knowledges*. Consequently, Residents’ Voices was designed around cross-cultural knowledge exchange and production. This approach draws on the work of

Gumucio-Dagron (2008, p. 5) who argues that the process of knowledge creation is ‘dynamic’, and that ‘individuals and communities start with the knowledge they already have, and put it in dialogue with the information they receive from other sources.’ Such a process rests on the fact that cultures are not closed and insular, ‘but living bodies of knowledge and experience that are constantly undergoing evolution and social transformation’ (Gumucio-Dagron, 2008, p. 5)

The remainder of this chapter is organised into three ‘Acts’ to discuss these cultural production processes within Residents’ Voices, and it makes use of the metaphor of the storytelling in a play as a way of organising the empirical cases. Each act describes a project undertaken under the banner of Residents’ Voices, and analyses the response to stereotyping and stigma. Acts 1 and 2 focus on a digital storytelling project (Act 1) and the ‘Housos’ research study (Act 2), which were components of Residents’ Voices. Act 3 covers a project that tangentially emerged from Residents’ Voices, the ‘Lost in the Woods’ film project conducted by the Woodville Community Centre with tenants in Western Sydney. We show how Residents’ Voices provided inspiration and conceptual guidance for this project without having any formal or practical role in the making of the film. This guidance took the form of digital storytelling project planning documents for tenants on the Residents’ Voices website. Importantly, the Lost in the Woods project was independently conceived of and managed by tenants who were supported by two non-government organisations. In each of these examples, social housing tenants, researchers and non-government organisations speak back to popular negative stereotypes. Yet, for tenants, in each case their main purpose was not primarily to influence public perceptions or the policy agenda, but rather *to reclaim and reinforce their own identity and connection to place*. By comparison, a key finding from Residents’ Voices is the observation that when we as researchers were prepared to step back from controlling the research process, tenants and local community organisations were not only willing to initiate their own projects, *they produced more complete and effective counter-cultural products when freed from academic framing and constraints*. Therefore, we conclude with some conceptual reflections about the methodological challenges we experienced or recorded while researching territorial stigma with tenants as co-researchers in Residents’ Voices.

### **Act 1: Digital storytelling project**

Residents’ Voices was designed to create opportunities for social housing tenants to develop and express their own knowledge and understanding of the links between place and disadvantage in their own terms (Darcy and Gwyther, 2012). The methodology for Residents’ Voices placed tenants at the centre of the research process, and included encouraging tenants to frame the research questions, undertake empirical research tasks, analyse any ‘data’, and publish and report the data in formats deemed appropriate by tenants. The project created a space for tenant-led projects to develop and one such project, the *Housos* study, is outlined later in this section. At the outset, to initiate the formal start of Residents’ Voices we

organised a suite of smaller collective storytelling projects with tenants who were already engaged with the project. One of these smaller projects was the Residents' Voices digital storytelling project.

Digital storytelling is a narrative-driven form of digital media production that allows people to share aspects of their life by making a short film, audio or photographic essay. While digital storytelling is a relatively new visual methodology within academia, it has a much longer history in the media and the corporate spheres (Lovejoy and Steele, 2004, p. 72). With the addition of increasingly affordable high quality digital media tools, such as photography equipment, video cameras and voice recorders, and online publication tools, digital storytelling is a performative practice that can be undertaken by almost anyone. As a digital media practice, digital storytelling is very diverse and might produce short radio documentaries, photographic essays, participant-directed autobiographical films or stop motion animation stories.

For Residents' Voices we commissioned Information and Cultural Exchange (ICE, <http://ice.org.au/>), a community arts organisation in Western Sydney, to run digital storytelling workshops as a capacity building process for both university researchers and tenant co-researchers. Lundby (2008) argues that increasing access to the Internet, low cost or free software and the rise of social media have allowed some marginalised groups to redeploy 'the age-old practices of storytelling' (p. 1) to self-represent their own social experience. Therefore, we wanted the tenants to not only create a digital story through the workshops, but more importantly, to acquire the skills and knowledge to create and teach others how to create additional digital stories in the future. This workshop involved five tenants and three university researchers (one of whom was also a resident as outlined below). We conducted two technical sessions in a film studio space and four content development sessions in a computer room at the local library near the tenants' homes. In the first two sessions the digital storytelling facilitators conducted classes on 'talking about personal stories', 'storyboarding for narrative development', 'using digital recording equipment', and 'using digital editing software'. In the four content development sessions, the tenants and researchers drafted their own personal narrative, and recorded it on a voice recorder. They also collected a suite of photographs to match their audio narrative. With help from the digital storytelling facilitators, the tenants and researchers produced their digital story by building a photographic essay over the top of their oral narrative using movie-editing software. The tenants'<sup>1</sup> stories covered topics including living in social housing with a mental illness, criminal activity and violence, interactions with law enforcement agencies, experiencing and addressing both personal and geographical stigma and living in social housing with family members with complex needs.

Guillemín and Drew (2010, p. 175) describe the academic digital storytelling process as follows, 'participants are asked by the researcher to produce photographs, video, drawings and other types of visual images as research data'. However, we set out to challenge the relationship between the researcher and the researched. In our first digital storytelling project we found that the production and



consumption of the digital cultural products was more dynamic and contested than Guillemin and Drew suggest. Participant-generated visual methodologies are not bound by the constraints of positivist empirical research frameworks, which define clear roles for the researcher and the researched. Indeed, one of the (PhD candidate) researchers from Residents' Voices participating in this workshop was at the time a social housing tenant living in the neighbourhood alongside the other participants. Thus our digital storytelling project involved multiple stakeholders with complex identities that very clearly called into question the researcher/researched dichotomy. At the request of tenants in our project we exposed the 'researchers' to the same digital storytelling process as the tenants, and the 'researchers' created digital stories alongside the tenants about their experiences with researching and creating 'data' about social housing. The researchers' stories covered ethical questions about conducting research on social housing with tenants as co-researchers. Our project became a collective process of knowledge creation whereby all the participants became autobiographical researchers.

Much of the literature on digital storytelling is focused on the way the participants have sought to deploy their stories to *talk back to*, or to *talk up to*, audiences of power (see the edited volume by Lundby, 2008). Others show how the storytellers have used their narratives to pursue 'transformations' of the social, cultural or political 'context in which it operates' (Lundby, 2008, p. 10). Residents' Voices had a different target audience in mind, and a cultural production process that involved more nuanced forms of political action. The storytellers had complex motivations for using digital storytelling and when freed from the constraints of external mediators, including researchers, the stories that they choose to tell challenged our assumptions about their political motives for being involved in the project. In many cases, the people making digital stories do so with the aim of sharing their story with a particular audience (Lovejoy and Steele, 2004). In Residents' Voices, the digital storytelling project participants were offered the chance to share their stories with other tenants, in locations around Australia and in the United States through publication on a website. Some tenants decided to share their stories, others did not. The communicative aim was focused on horizontal connections between tenants rather than, at this stage of the project, of speaking directly to the powerful. However, participants did not all share the same understanding of the purpose or impact of their cultural products, and two tenants in particular wanted to get their hands dirty with more 'academic' social research.

## **Act 2: Housos project**

The term 'housos' has long been in common use amongst Australian social housing tenants, signifying identification with a common community experience. The term doubtless has wider currency and forms part of the stigmatising language used by non-housos, and it took on an unequivocally pejorative tone in the 2011 television show *Housos*. This show is a satirical parody about the daily life of tenants in the fictitious 'Sunnyvale' social housing estate (Arthurson

*et al.*, 2014). In the Australian context, the use of the term *houso* as the title of the program immediately identifies a subject that is associated with very specific and well-defined urban spatial localities, evoking well-rehearsed and exaggerated stereotypes and popular perceptions concerning a jobless underclass. Even before the show was aired, the group of social housing tenants we had been working with approached Residents' Voices to collaborate on a research project focussed on tenants' perceptions of, and reactions to, the television show. The digital storytelling had built a collaborative relationship between the tenants and researchers to build upon.

*Housos* is a highly embellished representation of Australian social housing estates as lawless zones where people act outside of the law and common norms of society. In this depiction 'houso' is a proxy for an 'underclass' that is explicitly spatialised through clearly recognisable signifiers that identify tenants of specific urban spaces. The depictions of the social housing tenants draw on over-drawn but common caricatures and stereotypes. Characters such as Dazza, Shazza and Franky are portrayed as feckless individuals, who shun work, survive on welfare benefits, indulge in substance abuse, routinely commit crimes and cause generalised disorder. Highly dysfunctional families and relationships surround them. On the spectrum of Australian television programming *Housos* pushes the boundaries of mainstream televised comedy and attracts a relatively small, but devoted, audience following. Three key subject–concept relationships dominate the construction of the houso in the show. These are the housos' relationships to employment, criminal activity, and drug use (Arthurson *et al.*, 2014). *Housos* joins a growing list of television programmes whose central themes rework conventional concepts of class distinction, such as another highly popular Australian comedy programme *Kath and Kim* (Davis, 2008). Other programmes in this genre that attempt to portray a 'postindustrial underclass' include the UK-produced *Shameless* (Creeber, 2009), or 'documentaries' such as *Benefits Street* (based in Birmingham, UK) and *The Scheme* (based in Kilmarnock, Scotland). Recent UK work on cultural representations of class, drawing on Bourdieu (1986), has identified the dominant contemporary depictions of the working class in the media as based on ridicule, disgust (Lawler, 2005), and mockery (Raisborough and Adams, 2008) claiming that disgust is winning out (Lawler, 2005: 443). These representations of the working classes are used as part of the processes of maintaining middle-class distinction, authority, and security (Wacquant, 2007; 2008). Promotional materials provided by the producers of *Housos* include a satirical 'dictionary definition' of a houso that points towards similar class distinctions and derogatory representations of social housing tenants:

**houso** [how-zo], Informal: Often Disparaging. noun: 1. an uneducated person who lives in social housing. 2. a bigot or reactionary, especially from the urban working class. Adjective: 3. also, Housoish, narrow, prejudiced, or reactionary: a Houso attitude.

(Superchoc Productions, 2011, p. 1)



As noted above, the media is a key medium through which distinctions of class and territorial stigma are shaped, imposed, and reproduced. Thus, the Housos research commenced from acknowledging the importance of directly involving those being stigmatised and experiencing territorial stigma of place in all phases of the study design, implementation, and analysis. As social scientists who do not belong to this stigmatised group we recognised that the lived experiences of those being stigmatised may well reflect very different personal perspectives to our own. Indeed, the research was thought up and developed by the tenants themselves. The questions and methods for the Housos study emerged after the tenants asked us to organise a screening of the first episode of *Housos* at an inner-city social housing estate for an audience consisting of social housing tenants and community workers from across the greater Sydney metropolitan area. This was followed by hosting discussions with a panel of experts comprised of social housing tenants, including those who had raised concerns about the show. Audience responses to the programme varied on a continuum, with some ‘enjoying the show’ and others expressing the viewpoint that the stereotypes drawn on in the programme would ‘reinforce the stigma attached to social housing’ (Arthurson *et al.*, 2014). The discussion and question and answer (Q&A) session that followed resulted in a group of tenants developing a set of research questions to further investigate this issue. The themes of the questions encompassed: the role and focus of satire in society; the wider public’s conceptualisations of social housing estates; stigmatisation of residents of estates by the media; narrow and prejudiced understandings of social housing; and the dangers of ‘glamorised’ portrayals of disadvantage in the media.

These questions were then taken up in the tenant-led research project conducted over the nine-week first season of *Housos*. Two tenants who had been working closely with Residents’ Voices, Ross Smith<sup>2</sup> from Central Sydney and Peter Butler from Western Sydney, joined us as tenant-researchers and recruited tenants from their local area to participate in their study. Residents’ Voices provided institutional and research assistance during recruitment and throughout the project. The tenant–academic research team then recruited tenants from Adelaide (South Australia) and also non-tenant viewers of the show to participate in the research. Each week the 19 participants were sent an episode of *Housos* on DVD with a set of research questions. Participants watched each episode in their own time and responded to each week’s questions by writing or recording an audio or video diary. The audio and video diaries were often recorded on a mobile phone while the written diaries were sent by email.

The tenant-academic research team wanted the analytical framework to enable social housing tenants access to specific tools, including media and research resources. This was, at first, in order to contest derogatory and stigmatised narratives of social housing estates that so often go unmediated and unchallenged, especially by tenants (Hastings, 2004; Jacobs *et al.*, 2011; with some notable exceptions, e.g., Darcy and Rogers, 2015). Second, we wanted to enable participants to identify any counter narratives that emerged. The tenant members of the research team accordingly informed the selection of a theoretical framework for the analysis. Peter Butler, one of the tenant-researchers managing the study,

remarked in the Q&A session at the end of the screening on the inner-city estate about *Housos* that:

It strikes me that the programme is a bit like a mirror. And it depends who's holding the mirror and which direction it's pointing towards . . . I think all this show does, it reflects back a lot of the stereotypes that the public already has about people who live in social housing and it provides a convenient, sort of, stereotype or image up there on the screen, to help the public dump all their negative perceptions on these characters.

(Arthurson *et al.*, 2014, p. 1339)

The academic researchers (the three authors) on the team felt that it was important not to impose an analysis onto tenants. Thus the research team decided to hold a final focus group to conclude the study whereby the two tenant-researchers, a tenant community worker, and tenant participant from the study, reviewed and interpreted participants' contributions including tenant and non-tenant diaries. Some tenant researchers worried that *Housos* might provide a symbolic vehicle that will organise representations of Australian social housing tenants' experience well into the future, so they wanted the voices of tenants' to be heard in response to the show. In our presentation of findings we provided extensive quotes as representative of some of the key themes that emerged from the qualitative material – especially from the focus group – in order to convey these voices as directly as possible (see research findings in Arthurson *et al.*, 2014).

At the conclusion of the focus group, we had undertaken a thematic analysis of the tenant and non-tenant diaries and developed a set of broad tenant-driven research findings. The two tenant-researchers felt that it was important to disseminate the research in both academic and general media publications. In the first instance, they asked Residents' Voices to join them in writing up the research for presentation at an academic conference. Soon after, we wrote up the study collaboratively and presented it at the Australasian Housing Researchers Conference (Rogers *et al.*, 2012). Residents' Voices funded the travel and conference costs of tenants. One of the tenants also produced a number of publications for tenant newsletters and industry journals from this study. Additionally, the Residents' Voices team prepared an academic article for publication to meet our funding and research institution requirements.

### **Act 3: 'Lost in the Woods' film project**

Our third example of resident cultural production has its roots in the first Residents' Voices digital storytelling project, but the multi-directional transfer of knowledge in this case was by no means direct. While Residents' Voices was drawing the digital storytelling project to a close, the residents and a non-government organization on the Villawood East social housing estate, 25 km west of central Sydney, made plans for their own 'Residents' Voices Project'. Although the group asked for approval to use the name on the final product, this project had no formal institutional

relationship to Residents' Voices. It provides revealing insights about the emancipatory power of participant-driven visual methodologies, especially when these practices are freed from the disciplinary constraints of academia and the discursive constraints of talking back to the powerful with policy discourse.

As noted above, Residents' Voices asked Information and Cultural Exchange to run the first digital storytelling workshop as a capacity building project for the academic and resident researchers. The Residents' Voices team also included an academic filmmaker from Western Sydney University, who helped to run the initial content development workshops. Throughout the workshop the university researchers took detailed notes about the (1) structure of the workshop and (2) the workshop content. The university researchers wrote this information up in easy-to-read fact sheets and placed these fact sheets on the Residents' Voices website, largely as a resource for the tenants who were completing the workshop. The assumption of the Residents' Voices team during the initial digital storytelling workshops was that the tenants might come back to and use these resources in the future, if they decided to create further stories or to train other tenants in digital storytelling techniques. At this stage of Residents' Voices, the tenant-researcher team that had been involved in the Housos study had moved on to other projects – some of which involved using digital technologies to create transnational communication networks with tenants in Chicago.

Meanwhile, the residents of one particular street in the Villawood East estate took up the fact sheets and digital storytelling documents in a different way. After watching the Residents' Voices digital stories and reading the fact sheets, these residents and community workers from the Woodville Community Centre contacted Information and Cultural Exchange (ICE) to run a similar project in Villawood. Woodville Community Services funded the project. In this project, residents took a leading role in all aspects of the production process, and importantly, this included deciding to produce a film in a genre that was entirely different to the stories that were produced in the first Residents' Voices digital storytelling project. Without the formal involvement of Residents' Voices, the tenant filmmakers were free to produce their own cultural products on their own terms, which, furthermore, would not be constrained by the politics of academic research or housing policy. Surprisingly for the Residents' Voices team, although we would not find out about the project until it was well advanced, the Villawood tenants were about to help us meet one of the central aims of Residents' Voices – which was *to create opportunities for social housing residents to develop and express their own knowledge and understanding of the links between place and disadvantage in their own terms.*

As suggested in our planning documents, Woodville Community Services contacted ICE about running the film-making project. ICE employed film director Vanna Seang and a creative producer and dramaturge Nicholas Lathouris to work with the residents through a digital storytelling process that was longer and more refined than our own. The residents worked with these professionals to brainstorm their individual stories, in much the same way as we had done. They then further refined and developed these individual stories into a set of

collective and mostly fictionalised stories about life on their estate. This process involved many sessions where they collectively workshopped the storylines and wrote or improvised the script. After they had a working storyboard and script the project moved into the next stage of training. The residents completed training in locational film and sound recording, film directing and film production and acting. Working alongside ICE, the residents acted in, directed, shot and produced three films. They released these films under the collective title *Lost in the Woods*, with the centrepiece being a naturalistic fictional drama set in the Villawood estate. The films were showcased as part of 2014 Indi Gems emerging filmmaker festival held in Western Sydney.<sup>3</sup>

In mid 2014, a final Residents' Voices workshop was organised to draw together all of the projects and learning undertaken under the 'Residents' Voices Banner'. The highlight of the workshop was hearing about the *Lost in the Woods* project from the residents who were involved in the project. We also heard from the staff of Woodville Community Services who praised the film project and the hard work of the tenants. The tenant film-makers talked passionately about how their fictional film was purposely scripted to cover topics that reflect the trope of discourses about social housing, such as domestic violence, community violence and drug dealing. However, the film moves well beyond the commonly deployed narratives about social housing to present lived experiences in a new light. The filmmakers also address issues of asylum seeker settlement and detention in Western Sydney, which are largely absent from mainstream media. The film portrays a far more complex socio-cultural landscape than the one portrayed in *Housos*, which has to be navigated by tenants in Villawood on a daily basis. Tenants are negotiating cultural and class differences that many of Sydney's residents are not exposed to, such as welcoming new refugee populations into their neighbourhoods, and indeed, into Australian society more generally. They challenge the boundary between fiction and experience, with one of the filmmaker residents stating in the film *The Making of Lost in the Woods*, 'Some people could look at it as fiction, but for some people it could touch home.'

### **Conclusion: methodological challenges for researching territorial stigma**

Residents' Voices sought to explore the use of social media and new communication technologies to develop innovative methods through which knowledge might be collaboratively developed, critiqued and distributed. Residents' Voices built on the emerging potential of visualisation as a process of knowledge disclosure. The production process itself is as important as the visual outcome in understanding the knowledge quotient – where the process of designing the visual representation – as successive iterations of proposals and responses – reveals new insights into the situation. Residents' Voices drew on epistemological and methodological traditions within social science, including the sociology of knowledge and more specifically Insider/Outsider epistemology and the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Rogers *et al.*, 2013); and

community-based collaborative research methodology (Rowe, 2006) to provide support for the practice of knowledge production through the collaboration of lay and expert researchers as a counterpoint to knowledge produced by institutional experts alone. Martin (1996, p. 5) argues that 'the dominant group of experts in any field is usually closely linked to other power structures, typically government, industry, or professional bodies'. The trans-national spread of certain ideologically based theories and practices in regard to the social problem of poverty concentration within areas of social housing and subsequent 'solutions' suggests a close relationship between housing theorists and policy makers that leaves little space for alternate forms of knowledge, particularly from those most affected by the issues themselves (Allen, 2008). This challenge is one that the Insider perspective tries to resolve. Insider doctrine developed out of the long-standing problem in the sociology of knowledge relating to the differences in access to certain types of knowledge based on socio-economic position and the claim that at certain times particular groups have *privileged* (even *monopolistic*) access to particular kinds of knowledge (Merton, 1972; Biesta, 2007).

In more recent times Insiderism has broadened its frame, going beyond the academy and institutionalised knowledge production to incorporate lay researchers as Insiders (see for instance Biesta, 2007). Allen (2009) lays the foundation for lay people as Insider researchers arguing that social science has been so successful at defining and defending its position as a producer of 'superior' knowledge that it has developed an elite, symbiotic relationship with policy makers seeking 'solutions' to 'policy problems' (e.g. evidenced based policy). Rather than this being a benign enterprise, he argues, 'the imposition of a social scientific way of understanding the social world violates, at the most basic level, the understanding that ordinary people have of the social world' (Allen, 2009, p. 109). Indeed, it was the task of Residents' Voices to ensure that any conflicting perspectives between institutional researchers and those who actually experience living in social housing is made more visible. We deployed participatory research as a methodological tool to expose the conflicts and tensions, and in an attempt to produce countercultural digital media products.

Sociologists have been analysing and exposing the role played by the media in shaping and reproducing territorialised notions of class and disadvantage for well over a decade (Devereux *et al.*, 2011; Blokland, 2008; Warr, 2005; Palmer *et al.*, 2004). It is clear 'the media' is a key technology through which embellished depictions of class and disadvantage are mediated, and these familiar narratives often focus on both interpersonal and neighbourhood level disorder and crime. Therefore, the three resident-led media projects described above did not set out to collect 'data' about locational poverty that simply signifies the effects of territorial stigma. Rather, the Residents' Voices methodology sought to generate data that would shed light on how stigmatising categories and narratives are generated and reproduced. We set out to facilitate the framing of new questions and the reframing of old questions based on collaboration with local tenants in the design and implementation of Residents' Voices.<sup>4</sup> Certainly the cultural analysis and counter-cultural products produced by tenants in these projects reconceptualised

the media methods and tools that they could access and use to *talk back* to housing managers or policy makers. But perhaps more importantly, Residents' Voices provided a space for tenants to *talk back* to other housing research methodologies and knowledge systems. Central to this approach to knowledge creation was the reconceptualisation of the social actors who design and participate in these media projects. The digital media products that are produced by the resident groups have the power to directly challenge conventional approaches to understanding place stigma and disadvantage.

On a number of occasions, during these three projects, participants made it clear that they needed to talk to other tenants first, and did not feel comfortable or free to discuss their experiences or ideas with housing managers or researchers – especially while redevelopment and relocation is proceeding (e.g. some tenants did not share their digital stories). A central concern is that tenants in areas targeted for redevelopment have severely limited choice, or voice, in key debates and decisions affecting their living environments, and furthermore, that conventional policy-driven research on neighbourhood social conditions has effectively devalorised the situated knowledge of social housing tenants, compounding their relative powerlessness. These projects aimed to create a space where tenants are able to express, exchange and theorise about the impact of the places they live their lives, to validate their own knowledge, and to use it in ways which best suit their interests. As Wacquant (2007) shows, the 'social exclusion' of social tenants extends well beyond the individual tenant and the housing management arena. Tenants have long been excluded from the research processes that define the 'problems' with disadvantaged people and places. They have been excluded from producing counter-narratives about these people and places, and they are excluded from the policy discussions about how solutions should be framed and implemented.

## Notes

- 1 For example, see stories by Anita, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ve2dXKWHy4> and Peter, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ICSLmswhrA>).
- 2 The tenants gave us permission, indeed encouraged us to cite their names.
- 3 See trailer at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPjSqYroYDg>
- 4 After completing the Residents' Voices digital storytelling training one of the authors went on to study radio documentary at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School. He then co-found the SoundMinds Radio project ([www.soundminds.com.au](http://www.soundminds.com.au)) as a research communication project, which broadcasts a weekly national radio show. It is funded by the Community Broadcasting Foundation of Australia and broadcast the Deborah Warr interview about poverty porn cited above. In many ways, SoundMinds Radio is Act 4 of this chapter.

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# 12 'You have got to represent your ends'

## Youth territoriality in London

*Adefemi Adekunle*

### Introduction

This chapter looks at youth belonging, safety and territoriality in various parts of Islington, in London. As such it hopes to add nuance and substance to debates over the 'functional disconnection of dispossessed neighbourhoods from the national and global economies' (Wacquant, 2008, p. 67), allowing us a new perspective on previously abstracted policy debates (Rose *et al.*, 2013). This chapter emerged from observations of how young people (aged between 13 and 21) acted and moved around their neighbourhood. Through participation in a youth work intervention project, this group of engaged young people was asked through a number of reiterative methods how they used and thought about their specific area (see Adekunle, 2013).

The research question itself seemed simple and originates in my own personal experience. As a volunteer youth worker, I tried to understand the motivation of young people who at times – point blank – refused to go into neighbouring areas and certain parts of London that resembled their own. There was a curious mixture of fear mixed with a desire to express bravado and explore these other areas. I witnessed young people eager to explore certain areas in order to 'rep' or 'represent' their neighbourhood, even though they were aware of the possibility of being 'rushed' or (physically) challenged. They were also eager to 'rush' unfamiliar faces who would enter 'their' neighbourhood, despite the fact that, if they looked hard enough, they would realise that there were potential webs of familiarity connecting them to these visitors: these 'intruders' could well have been cousins of someone from the area; they might find that they had gone to the same primary school as this person; or they might realise, quite simply, that this was a 'friend of a friend'. What appeared to be a form of territorial defence seemed all the more surprising when one considers how much London resembles a series of inter-linked villages: it is remarkably easy to find connections amongst young people living in areas neighbouring each other, whether these were established in school, through family or friends. My personal experience and my awareness of the literature prompted me to consider a number of questions. First, do young Londoners from areas with negative representations actually absorb the stigmatising imagery about the place in which they reside? If, as I argue here, they somehow manage