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Housing governance and racialisation: 'inclusivity' in housing access and experience

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ABSTRACT

In March 2022, the UK government refined its approach to tackling systemic inequalities with a seemingly innocuous refrain: 'inclusivity'. The instilling of shared values and economic development were discursively framed in central government rhetoric as the solutions to existing disparities and processes that were linked to places deemed as deprived. Drawing on data from forty-seven interviews with policy practitioners, anti-racist networks, and racially minoritised residents in two UK sites (Oldham and Glasgow), this article examines the persistent ways that racialised discourses, structures and ideologies shape housing access and experience. The insights generated from this article shed light on housing policy in three ways: firstly, by identifying the pervasiveness of racialisation and racism in social housing allocation systems; secondly, by evidencing the devaluing of anti-racist knowledge and the role of urban development initiatives in erasing anti-racist networks; and, thirdly, by exploring how local practitioners identify the problems of housing inclusivity as rooted in lack of residential mixing and inter-personal racism, rather than operating institutionally. The article concludes that adopting an approach that is attentive to institutional forms of whiteness and racialisation enhances understanding of the policy landscapes within which practitioners operate, and the existing racial injustices in housing experience that are reproduced.

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Introduction

This article is concerned with the impact of housing governance on the lives of racially minoritised residents. It examines local housing access and experience, from the perspective of racially minoritised residents, anti-racist networks, and local housing practitioners. Whilst studies have emphasised the dynamic and contextual processes that

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lead to policy formation and implementation (Meer 2020a), racial inequality in housing access has been identified as persistent, historically-embedded, and normalised in the UK context (Lukes, de Noronha, and Finney 2019). Existing research has established how racially minoritised residents are at disproportionate risk of experiencing overcrowding, housing deprivation, and precarious housing (Clare *et al.* 2022; Harrison *et al.* 2023). Racially minoritised residents have also been shown to be allocated accommodations they deem as sub-standard quality in their navigation of social housing systems, in the context of an increasingly under-resourced and fragmented UK system (Menezes, Netto, and Hasan 2023).

Drawing on data from forty-seven interviews with policy practitioners and racially minoritised residents based in Oldham and Glasgow East/North East, this article explores the persistent ways that racialised discourses, structures and ideologies feature in contemporary local housing governance and experience, in a broader context where 'inclusivity' via shared values and urban development is posed as the solution to inequalities. The article examines the perspectives of racialised residents on their housing allocation and access, including instances where anti-racist organisations have been devalued by housing and planning authorities, and undermined by residential redevelopment and relocation. We also scrutinise how, despite such racialised exclusions, institutional policy repertoires mobilised by local practitioners continue to expunge racial inequalities from their institutional remits. The insights generated from this article shed light on housing policy in three ways. Firstly, we identify the role of racialisation and racism within housing allocation, processes that we interpret as shaped by institutional forms of whiteness that render racially minoritised residents vulnerable and invisible. Secondly, we find evidence of the devaluing of anti-racist knowledge and the role of urban development in erasing anti-racist networks, despite the crucial role of such social structures in facilitating residents' navigation of housing allocation processes. Thirdly, we examine how local housing practitioners' understandings and narrations often identify the problems of housing inclusivity as being rooted in a lack of (desire for) residential mixing and inter-personal racism, rather than operating institutionally. These processes are recognised as being reinforced by current and historic policy rhetoric of 'inclusivity' and an emphasis on urban development and ethnic mixing as a 'solution' to the perceived problems of diverse places that are cast as marginal(ised) and deprived.

Literature review: 'Race', inclusivity and housing policy

The primary social housing allocation policy in the UK is constituted in a system known as Choice-Based Lettings. Introduced in the UK in 2001 and subsequently expanded, Choice-Based Lettings enable social housing landlords to list their available properties online, with residents lodging applications for consideration. Whilst the use of Choice-Based Lettings has been discursively framed in policy as placing agency and choice at the centre of acquiring social housing (Galbraith 2017), evidence has suggested that racialised residents can face 'a lack of real choice' in navigating the system due to being confined to bidding for accommodations in areas with high rates of deprivation and existing inequality (Manley and van Ham 2011, 3126). Studies have also shed light on the multiple, intersecting exclusions that racially minoritised residents experience in navigating processes of Choice-Based Lettings housing allocations (Clare *et al.*

2022), including potential barriers on the basis of a lack of relevant information, subjectivity to racial discrimination, language barriers, and varying technology skills of applicants (Menezes, Netto, and Hasan 2023). The reduction of specialist 'Black And Minority Ethnic' (BME) housing associations, meanwhile, has been accompanied by the dismantling of networks that were central to facilitating access historically (Gulliver and Prentice 2015).

In this context, institutional demands to 'mix' and avoid 'self-segregation' have remained prominent features of contemporary housing governance, reflective of the ways in which 'race' has long shaped housing and broader social policy (Miah, Sanderson, and Thomas 2020). Assertions of 'segregation' have become more explicit in post-2001 policy contexts (Finney and Simpson 2009; Rhodes and Brown, 2019), with UK housing conditions, demographics, and the parameters of who is racialised as the newest 'folk devil' shifting to incorporate the figure of the 'Muslim' over recent decades (Alexander et al. 2020). Here, increased concern over 'Muslim integration' was seen as exhibited within purportedly high levels of residential segregation, often presented as self-determined (Kundnani 2007). Over two decades on, and despite evidence of increasing ethnic diversification in neighbourhoods across the UK (Catney *et al.* 2023), discursive frames of 'segregation' continue to problematise the spatial clustering of racially minoritised residents, obscuring the 'shared experiences of disadvantage, discrimination, racism and exclusion [that] have acted to create and reinforce resilient social bonds within the neighbourhood' (Frost, Catney, and Vaughn 2022, 1585). Such policy discourses tend to obscure residents' exposure to, and experiences of, structural racism (Kapoor 2013), and pose the construction of 'mixed communities' via social interactions and urban development as the remedy to perceived 'segregation' (Slater and Anderson 2012). The UK's contemporary policy concern of building an 'Inclusive Britain' via shared values and urban development can thus be situated in a longer context of housing policy, in which integration and cohesion policies have been critiqued as subsuming notions of 'race' into broader agendas, whilst continuing to underlie such strategies implicitly (Finney *et al.* 2019; Harries *et al.* 2019).

Local housing practices offer a revealing means through which to observe how a centralised emphasis on 'inclusivity' can ignore (and delegitimise) substantive recognition of racial inequality. As Clare et al. (2022) argue, there is a risk of obscuring how 'race' is constitutive of housing systems, particularly in broader contexts of the peripheralising of 'race' and 'racial inequality' in policy discourse since the early twenty-first century (Finney *et al.* 2019; Jones 2013). Policy repertoires that tend to be mobilised in 'race' policy have thus been critiqued as formed within a broader social system in which whiteness is normative. As Mills (2007, 25) neatly summarises:

> If the society is one structured by relations of domination and subordination … conceptual apparatus is likely going to be shaped and inflected in various ways by the biases of the ruling group(s). So crucial concepts may well be misleading in their inner makeup and their external relation to a larger doxastic architecture.

Mills (2007) thus introduces the concept of 'white ignorance', a term that draws attention to how policy is understood, and how specific approaches and tools are normalised and mobilised at the expense of other (anti-racist) initiatives. Structures of 'whiteness' have been shown to be deeply entrenched in institutional imaginaries and practice

(Alexander et al. 2020), with responsibility for neighbourhood neglect and conflict often assigned to local residents rather than identified institutionally amongst policymakers and developers (Hill, Meer, and Peace 2021).

Within broader structures of institutional whiteness in housing systems, agendas of integration and inclusivity are embedded within the operations of local government, with local housing practices inflected and shaped by particular place-based histories and contexts (Finney *et al.* 2019; Jones 2013). Responsibility for approaches to managing 'race relations' is thus enacted at local levels (Harries *et al.* 2019), with those who operate as 'street-level bureaucrats' working within the confines of central government policy whilst possessing limited discretion in the form of service design (Lipsky 2010, 13). Frontline practitioners have been shown to work pragmatically in a UK context of shrinking local resources and austerity measures, although the complex inequalities embedded in welfare systems and public services further constrain practitioners' abilities to reflexively respond to service users' needs (Berg 2019; Haycox 2022). Professional roles may also shape which narratives are shared, particularly in a context in which concepts of need facilitate access to funding (Mesarič and Vacchelli 2019), expectations of practitioners' neutrality are maintained (Anderson 2017) and articulations of 'race' have been largely expunged within social policy (Craig 2013; Finney *et al.* 2019; Meer 2020b).

The disavowal of 'race' in housing discourse may be viewed as an extension of a broader insistence by the UK Government that racial inequality is a second-order effect (Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparities 2021; Meer 2022), to be relegated in its policy import in favour of an agenda of 'Inclusive Britain'. The primary strategic aim of establishing an 'Inclusive Britain' appears to involve instilling 'shared values, and a shared history' (HM Government 2022, 83), and expanding infrastructure investment and economic development to 'places with the poorest socio-economic outcomes' (HM Government 2022, 15). As the strategy document states:

> The government's plans to boost economic growth … are crucial to tackling the long-term, historic disparities experienced by ethnic minority groups … Inclusion also requires that everyone has a stake in society – not just in their own prosperity but that of their neighbours and fellow citizens … We do not define ourselves by our differences but instead on what we have in common (HM Government 2022, 15:83).

This vision of an Inclusive Britain thus conjures a set of abstract ideas in relation to concepts of community, identity and participation, and positions infrastructure investment and shared values as the remedy to racial disparities. By focusing on contemporary local housing governance, we explore how certain policy approaches originate from institutionally privileged locations from the perspective of racially minoritised residents, practices that risk reproducing racialised inequalities.

Case selection and methodology

In the summer 2001, a series of violent incidents occurred in Oldham and Glasgow East/North East. A succession of civil disturbances arose between 'white' locals and British men of South Asian heritage in Oldham, leading to the labelling of the area as the 'capital of racial tension' (Harris 2001). Two months later, the murder of Firsat Dag, a Kurdish asylum seeker, in an area in Glasgow East/North East led to claims that 'the name of Sighthill represents a dark passage in the history of Glasgow and Scotland'

(Kemp 2001). Oldham and Glasgow East/North East have thus both been re-presented in their localised histories as sites emblematic of, and shaped by, racial conflict. Two decades later, these labels remain prominent in policy discourses and practitioners' understandings (Jones 2013; Smith *et al.* 2021). Practitioners based in Oldham and Glasgow East/North East are operating in localities that have been subject to territorial stigmatisation and signified as spaces of deprivation and conflict where residents have been rendered visible based on 'race' and 'class' (i.e. a 'white working class' and those racially minoritised). Data generated from the UK-wide Census can further shed light on the local housing contexts of the two localities, with the proportion of residents accessing social housing in Oldham (21.2%) and Glasgow (24%) being significantly higher than the national average (17.1%) (NRS 2011; ONS 2021).[1]

Parallel histories have shaped current housing contexts in the two areas, including policies of slum clearance (1960s) and cycles of demolition and asylum Dispersal. The two sites have also been labelled in media discourse as emblematic of 'failed' spaces of multiculturalism, assertions that are frequently situated geographically (Miah, Sanderson, and Thomas 2020). Located in the East/North East of Manchester, Oldham is positioned at the periphery of the city centre. The area historically relied on its textile (cotton and wool) production in the early twentieth century, with increased migration of colonial citizens following the Second World War (Jones 2013). Racially exclusionary policies in employment and housing and the subsequent decline of textile industries have resulted in distinct racialised geographies in the area, with race and class divisions remaining particularly pronounced between different parts of the town (Rhodes, Ashe, and Valluvan 2019).

In contemporary contexts, the resident population in Oldham predominantly self-identified as 'White' and 'British South Asian', with 68.1% of residents self-identifying as 'White', 24.6% of residents self-identifying as 'Asian', 'Asian British' or 'Asian Welsh' and 3.4% self-identifying as 'Black' (ONS 2021). The borough further registers statistically high rates of child poverty in areas where racially minoritised residents are concentrated (see Rhodes, Ashe, and Valluvan 2019). Due to its highly politicised history in the early twenty-first century, Oldham is often represented as emblematic of broader discourses of 'race', 'class' and community conflict. Prior forms of the racialisation of the town through the 2001 'race riots' continue to inflect place-based narratives, events that have been linked to significant votes for far-right and right-wing populist parties during this time and the alleged assertions of racial 'no-go' areas (Jones 2013; Rhodes, Ashe, and Valluvan 2019). Oldham remains a site that has been stigmatised and depicted as 'one of the worst places to live' in England (Topping 2022).

Corresponding with the broad historical trends in Oldham, Glasgow is a post-industrial city with increased migration of colonial citizens to the area to seek work in a post-War context (Virdee, Kyriakides, and Modood 2006). As a site of huge industrial development and trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Glasgow became known as the 'second city of Empire' (Mackenzie 2017), and is currently the local authority with the highest proportion of Dispersed people seeking asylum in the UK (74 per 10,000 residents) (Sturge 2023). Glasgow East/North East was one of the first sites in 2001 to which asylum seekers were Dispersed, with low land and property values in Glasgow East subsequently attracting private subcontractors to fulfil Dispersal contracts at a

lower cost than social or Council providers (Hill, Meer, and Peace 2021). In the UK context, Dispersal accommodation in the asylum system is provided on a no-choice basis (Darling 2016) and people seeking asylum are prevented from seeking alternative recourse to housing using social welfare routes, in comparison to existing racially minoritised communities (Meer 2020a).

Racially minoritised residents constitute 21% of Glasgow's population, making it the most ethnically diverse city in Scotland (CoDE 2014). Furthermore, racialised minorities form 15.2% of the population of Glasgow East/North East (Glasgow City Council 2017). The neighbourhoods in Glasgow East/North East and across the city operate as highly racialised spaces, with media and political representations of overcrowded housing tied to racialised processes that stigmatise and exclude (Smith *et al.* 2021).

This article draws on research based in Oldham and Glasgow East/North East that explored the impact and experience of housing governance from the perspectives of housing practitioners and racially minoritised residents. The localities were chosen due to similarities (as noted above) as well as differences in national and regional contexts, housing systems, demographic make-up and processes of stigmatisation. The project adopts an inclusive definition of the term 'racialised minorities', by focusing on how particular structurally minoritised persons are racialised in different ways in housing governance.

The empirical data analysed in this article are qualitative interviews with two groups: practitioners and racially minoritised residents. Partner organisations who possessed expertise in the rental sector and provided housing support were consulted in identifying appropriate interviewees. Criteria for inclusion for racially minoritised residents involved experiences of living in the two localities during the period of fieldwork, and housing practitioners were recruited based on their professional experience in local housing practices. Forty-seven interviews (with 51 individuals) were undertaken as part of the project (18 interviews in Glasgow East/North East and 29 interviews in Oldham). A total of 17 interviews were conducted with racially minoritised residents living in Oldham, and 12 interviews were undertaken with expert housing practitioners working in the borough. In Glasgow, ten interviews were conducted with residents, and additional eight interviews were conducted with expert practitioners. A large majority of expert practitioner interviewees self-identified as 'White', and also lived in Oldham or Glasgow. Practitioner participants included housing association professionals, NGO representatives and local authority providers who could be classified as 'frontline service providers' (Berg 2019, 185). Such individuals operate within the confines of mandated central government policy but possess discretionary powers in relation to the allocation of local services. All practitioners interviewed had extensive experience in working either in housing or in local authority positions, and could therefore comment on the longer trajectory of housing governance and practice for racially minoritised residents. Participants were all adults (over the ages of 16 in Scotland and 18 in England) and the research received full ethical approval from The University of St Andrews Ethics Committee.

Interviews were conducted between November 2021 and May 2022 and focused specifically on housing experiences for racially minoritised residents. Practitioner interviews examined such professionals' perceptions of housing experiences for racially minoritised residents. Topics included the broader framing of inclusivity policy in central government strategies, including ongoing economic development initiatives and

community support, although the 'Inclusive Britain' report was not the primary focus of the interviews.

Findings

Resident experiences: navigating housing allocation and institutional positionings

This first section considers the experience and impact of housing governance in racially minoritised residents' lives. It analyses residents' perceptions of how they are institutionally processed in the social housing allocation system of Choice-Based Lettings, including how racialised representations of vulnerability and choice shape which communities are granted access to support. It further sheds light on the vital role of anti-racist networks in circumventing identified housing exclusions.

Catherine had lived in Oldham with her two children for five years prior to our interview taking place. As a single mother, she migrated to the UK as a victim-survivor of domestic violence and was first accommodated in social housing upon arrival. In response to questions regarding her initial experience of the social housing that she was allocated, she shared instances of racial harassment and feeling unsafe for herself and her children:

> When I first moved to [neighbourhood], I did live in a house with a flat, and I don't know what happened there. My car was vandalised, my door was set on fire, the neighbour there was always harassing me. I and my kids were always scared. When we go out we tiptoed on the stairs to go out, so they don't know when we're going, and don't know when we're coming in (Catherine, 2021, Resident, Oldham)

As a result of such racial harassment, Catherine and her two children moved to private accommodation and were placed on a waiting list for social accommodation at the time of the interview.

In describing the inequalities embedded in housing access, Catherine drew attention to the primary social housing allocation policy in the UK, the system of Choice-Based Lettings. During this process, a resident will 'bid' for an accommodation, and the local Council determines the successful applicant after examining who is deemed as a high priority need. Whilst evidence has suggested that such schemes risk exacerbating inequalities in relation to minoritised groups (Menezes, Netto, and Hasan 2023), there has been less attention on how the policy devices used in housing allocation systems are shaped by forms of institutional whiteness, and their subsequent impacts on residents. Catherine considered that she was racially discriminated against in the social housing allocation process in comparison with other ('white') applicants. This was illustrated in her inadvertent acceptance and subsequent decline of a local Council social housing offer that was located in the same neighbourhood where she experienced racist violence. As a result, her case is no longer recognised by the local Council as one of priority need, and her circumstances have been re-categorised by the local Council as less urgent in future applications:

> I bid for a flat, and I didn't know … [it's] still in the same [area] … I was still going through that trauma then when this house came … The idea terrorises me … The Council for that reason … For them, I'm not at risk of being homeless because I didn't

> accept that. I've not had any, not even like consideration … If I'm white, would I be in the same situation? That question keeps coming up in my head. I don't know why (Catherine, 2021, Resident, Oldham)

Mills (2007, 18) defines institutional ignorance as an active production of whiteness in institutional structures, including how 'what people of colour quickly come to see – in a sense, the primary epistemic principle of the racialised social epistemology of which they are the object – is that they are not seen at all'. Catherine perceives her positioning as a racially minoritised woman as a further component that renders her vulnerable and invisible in housing systems due to being deprioritised in the allocations list. Her experiences can be situated in comparison with bureaucratic processes that deem her 'choice' to decline housing offers as a signifier of her invulnerability, rather than as a response to racism. Catherine shared how it was her previous experience of racial harassment that motivated her to decline the local Council's latest social housing offer. However, rather than recognising that her choice was shaped by her vulnerability to racial harassment in the area, the local Council deemed her rejection as a sign of her lack of priority need:

> I made the mistake … If I was British, if I am White, and I made a mistake, because I'm being penalised I made a mistake … So, I feel if I was British, would they consider my mental health? But no, because you are Black who is going to speak for you? … I'm not the only one being treated this way … Where is the fairness there? Where is the respect for diversity, equality, where is it here? … .You see only me, but I feel I'm speaking for loads and loads of Black, on behalf of loads of Black, struggling families (Catherine, 2021, Resident, Oldham)

Residents' subjection to racial harassment and subsequent fear of being placed into certain ('white') neighbourhoods is often explained in institutional narratives as due to self-segregation, rather than vulnerability to discrimination (Finney and Simpson 2009; Kundnani 2007). Catherine's narrative thus aligns with a broader critique of how housing allocation systems (including Choice-Based Lettings) often fail to address the underlying power relations that reinforce racial inequalities, and instead rely on broader racialised and cultural stereotypes of preference, ghettoisation, and 'choice' (Clare *et al.* 2022; Finney *et al.* 2019).

In negotiating the additional institutional barriers resulting from her declining housing allocation, Catherine drew on support from a local specialist organisation targeted at the experiences of racially minoritised women. However, whilst the organisation provided support in navigating housing systems and educational training, her precarious circumstances remain in her privately-rented accommodation, given her categorisation as lacking priority need. Catherine is thus accessing privately rented accommodation on a temporary basis, and is subject to a six-month tenancy agreement, whilst awaiting further social housing allocations:

> [Specialist organisation] has been great, but I've still got things to sort out … We don't have a home. [Specialist organisation] has been very good, but … it is not a home (Catherine, 2021, Resident, Oldham).

Ian's experience similarly illustrates the racialised operations that impact residents' access to social housing. Ian arrived in Glasgow East/North East in 2002, after having been raised in South London. He was initially accommodated in a flat in social

housing provisions. During the subsequent decade, Ian co-ordinated a community-led campaign amongst residents of his tower block accommodation, to advocate for the protection of social housing provisions. His narrative of housing experience further sheds light on the intersecting racialised inequalities embedded in systems of social housing allocations. In describing the Choice-Based Lettings process, he drew attention to the institutional narration of a 'colour-blind' housing system, a familiar narrative whereby Scotland is perceived as the exception to issues of institutional racism (Hunter and Meer 2018):

> You have to bid for online, and that disadvantages anybody who's no good at … English language, doing online, or who's poor at using computers … It's an unfair system, which is basically a system of housing rationing … The presumed colour blindness of the system, and the presumed, 'Oh we're not discriminating', when in fact the system is extraordinarily discriminating (Ian, 2021, Resident, Glasgow)

As Meer (2020a, 234) demonstrates, racial inequality is frequently described as a 'puzzle' to be solved, without grasping how whiteness is normalised within institutional remits and as part of discursive formations of place-based identities. In comparison with dominant narratives of Scottish exceptionalism to institutional racism (Hunter and Meer 2018), Ian links the presumed 'colour-blindness' of the system as actively perpetuating exclusions for racially minoritised residents. A key component of such exclusions includes a failure of housing associations to impart knowledge and to employ policy devices that are reflective of racialised residents' lived experiences, in a broader context where specialist housing organisations attentive to racial inequalities have been eroded (Finney *et al.* 2019; Gulliver and Prentice 2015):

> And to work your way, and the narratives of how the system works, you have to have some system insider knowledge for that. It does seem to take longer for BAME applicants to get that sorted, much longer than it should. They don't get to find out about things that housing associations should do … It's when people are supported by, you know, a community activist, or maybe a law centre … or a community group that's supporting them to make their application (Ian, 2021, Resident, Glasgow)

The role of institutional whiteness in housing allocation systems is also further evidenced in an extract from an interview with Muhamed, a local resident in Glasgow. In acquiring appropriate and affordable social housing accommodation, Muhamed revealed the vital role of an anti-racist organisation in facilitating his successful acquirement of social housing:

> Because of my interaction with [specialist organisation], me being volunteering with them … one of them was able to offer me a flat. [The Housing Association Officer] got really surprised that I got a flat in a very nice area, he was very surprised that I got a job with [specialist organisation] and he didn't hide it, he didn't hide how racist he was. I decided at that moment, well, I would have to tell him: 'By the way, I'm a specialist in public health, I'm a medical doctor by profession and I have been doing this, this and that'. And, then his face dropped. The only thing that he said: 'Well, I wish you luck' (Muhamed, 2021, Resident, Glasgow).

Catherine, Muhamed, and Ian's experiences together constitute not only examples of individual practitioners' neglect but illustrate how racially minoritised residents' quest for accommodation occurs within (and is constrained by) a context of institutional whiteness (Meer 2022). Each resident draws attention to the narratives that are

embedded in practitioners' institutional work, and how they navigated their own positioning in white institutional narratives and drew on support from specialist organisations as a form of resistance.

Anti-Racist network perspectives and knowledge

This second section identifies and evaluates the perspectives of anti-racist activists and organisational leads in their engagement with mainstream housing associations. Community organisations and networks are evidenced to be crucial in facilitating support in contexts of housing exclusions, with inequalities perceived by residents to be rooted in an institutional whiteness that fails to account for the role that 'race' and racism play in gaining access to appropriate and affordable accommodation. This section further demonstrates the consequences of mainstream housing systems in marginalising the knowledge produced by anti-racist networks. Such impacts include the inadvertent dismantling of the community support structures that were identified as essential for minoritised residents in their navigation of racial inequalities in housing structures, aspects that are shown to undermine minoritised residents' housing experiences. This erasure is deemed to be a further consequence of the embedding of institutional ignorance (or whiteness) in housing governance.

Thus far, the knowledge developed by anti-racist networks and specialist organisations has been identified by racially minoritised residents as an important component in navigating the institutional ignorance (or whiteness) embedded in housing systems. However, anti-racist organisations shared consistent obstacles throughout their consultations with housing associations in their attempts to embed and implement an anti-racist approach. Ahmed's story is one example. Ahmed arrived in Oldham in the 1970s as a child, after his parents migrated to the borough to pursue employment opportunities. During the past fifty years, Ahmed has established a forum for local racially minoritised residents and has advocated continuously for a systemic approach attentive to the ramifications of institutional racism in housing access. In reflecting upon the role of 'race' in housing governance, Ahmed emphasised the impact of institutional racism on residents' access to appropriate and affordable housing, including issues of overcrowding and delays in access:

> When it comes to discrimination and racism, no, it hasn't gone better … .The institutional racism … discrimination in, for example, housing … .we've got overcrowding … We have not done anything about that to kind of support people, either to give them the support and the resources … there is shortage of housing … people on a waiting list (Ahmed, 2021, Resident, Oldham)

As Carstenson and Schmidt (2016: 323) demonstrate, institutional rationales for mobilising specific policy repertoire 'depend for success on their ability to define the problems to be solved, and to propose adequate policy solutions to those problems'. In a broader context of de-racialised policy rhetoric of 'inclusivity', Ahmed identified how policy devices that remain prominent in housing governance may risk obscuring the structural barriers faced by minoritised residents in navigating these housing systems:

> I think the government around, or the organisations are trying to do their best; but that best can become a problematic … You think it's a solution but it could be a problematic, because

> the solution we are looking for doesn't reflect the society that we are working with because we haven't actually studied about them … We learned stories about them but we haven't actually learned the feelings about them … . You can create an environment which is not a box … And that reflects the society that we are trying to work with. Now in that kind of thing, I would say that we haven't created that environment yet (Ahmed, 2021, Resident, Oldham)

The concealment of racialised inequalities in the process of housing governance demonstrates what Mills (2007, 20) terms 'an ignorance, a non-knowing, that is not contingent, but in which race – white racism or white racial domination and their ramifications – is central to its origins'.

One example of such institutional ignorance included the perceived devaluing of anti-racist knowledge in developing policy responses to local (racial) inequalities. Martin shared his long history in Oldham in establishing community-based networks for racially minoritised residents, both in relation to housing allocation, and further in relation to projects of economic development. In a context where assertions of segregation and ghettoisation remain embedded (Finney *et al.* 2019), Martin shed light on how residents' own ideas of place-making were marginalised in ensuing strategies. Urban development was one such area where he deemed that specialist housing organisations had been systemically excluded, despite participating in local consultations:

> [The anti-racist organisation] lost interest in consulting, because they are consulted but then they are not properly engaged … That's been happening for the past 40, 50 years now … . We have spent a lot of time with consultation, but … they see no improvement, then we go back and have another consultation, then five years back we go and have another consultation … Our system and our thinking and our planning has stayed the same … What we need to do is to dismantle that, you see, and to create that environment … to reflect that society (Martin, 2021, Resident, Oldham).

The ramifications of such perceived devaluing of anti-racist knowledge were shaped by local contexts, histories and the subjective experiences of residents interviewed. In both Oldham and Glasgow East/North East, anti-racist activism had developed over time as a source of solidarity and support in response to structural discrimination. However, in Glasgow, the perceived limited incorporation of community-led knowledge from anti-racist networks was found to lead to their erasure. Ian, as evidenced earlier in this article, established the importance of anti-racist networks as a crucial mechanism for navigating housing exclusions. During his time living in the tower block in Glasgow, Ian shared the development of anti-racist networks to advocate on behalf of local residents. However, urban development programmes were shown to inadvertently displace and disrupt anti-racist networks due to the demolition of accommodation in racialised sites. Rather than acting as an integrating and inclusive force, Ian identified how a de-racialised approach to urban development created and reflected significant power divisions, and undermined anti-racist networks:

> The moment you build community organisations, and then you build leaders … they're then dispersed to the four winds, as their house gets demolished. And then you have to start that process all over again in the place they've moved … And that has been a consistent strategy, in a way, that has undermined. It may have not been deliberately intended to do that, but it's had the effect of undermining BME voluntary sector community organising, and

> undermining the link between leaders, communities. … [to] build links of solidarity (Ian, 2021, Resident, Glasgow)

Local residents in Oldham similarly cited perceptions of the devaluing of anti-racist knowledge and networks in urban development strategies, as has been evidenced in prior studies (Gulliver and Prentice 2015). Maya had lived in Oldham for five years at the time of the interview and was involved in local anti-racist housing activism. Maya emphasised the importance of material investment in the architecture of the building where the organisation operated: 'We've been so blessed … they're doing some renovations [to] … create that home'. However, the devaluing of anti-racist knowledge was further exhibited in her reflections on urban development strategies in her local neighbourhood, creating deep feelings of insecurity. In response to being asked to elaborate on her perspective of local urban development strategies, Maya drew upon recent local Council plans to demolish a local market in her (racialised neighbourhood). Maya emphasised that the local market was a site of solidarity, safety, and socialisation amongst racially minoritised residents in the local area:

> We've got the indoor market and an outdoor market, [and] them getting rid of that … It'll just takes away the whole complete feel of the environment for people and I don't think there's any consideration taken in whatsoever about the residents and how that affects them … The sense of community and comfort … If you take away the market it would be so unfair (Maya, 2021, Resident, Oldham)

Maya identifies decisions to demolish the local market in urban development initiatives as creating and reflecting significant power divisions, and undermining the existing community networks established in her neighbourhood:

> We are the ones who live here … People who are building … don't know how it affects people on a day to day. … It's sad not being heard … There's two worlds and I'm not part of that world, and that's the world with the power (Maya, 2021, Resident, Oldham).

Local housing practitioners: the policy devices and institutional responses to building local inclusivity

Following the analysis of residents' perspectives, contemporary local housing governance is demonstrated in this section to perpetuate existing racialised inequalities by remaining inattentive to structural disadvantage and lived experiences, including in navigations of housing access and in the erasure of anti-racist networks. Practitioners' perspectives shed light on how policies operated upon the premise that racial segregation was pervasive and deeply embedded in the two locations and that this could be addressed via housing governance and urban development. However, such views undermine the role of structural and institutional inequalities in driving this process and also rest upon racialised depictions of specific places and communities, which can work to further stigmatise. Such representations shape ideas as to who 'inclusivity' policies should be targeted at, and offer problematic diagnostic rationales for this.

As narratives of problematic residential 'segregation' were primarily targeted towards British South Asian populations in Oldham and recipients of asylum Dispersal in Glasgow East/North East, racially stigmatised neighbourhoods were narrated by practitioners as places of racial division. One housing practitioner in Oldham, Helen,

operated in neighbourhoods where a significant proportion of racially minoritised residents live. In describing contemporary features of Oldham, Helen viewed particular neighbourhoods as racially coded and sites of 'segregation':

> The ethnic demographics … there are pockets full of communities. They are not integrated … If somebody says Glodwick to you, that is where the Pakistanis live … If somebody said to you Westwood, that is where the Bangladeshi community lives. There is no integration (Helen, 2021, Housing Practitioner, Oldham)

Glodwick and Westwood are localities where sensationalist media discourses of 'no-go' areas are frequently targeted and racialised perceptions of the housing market permeate (Miah, Sanderson, and Thomas 2020). Paralleling practitioners' positioning of racial 'segregation' as entrenched in Oldham, the spatial clustering of racially minoritised residents in sites of asylum Dispersal was also problematised in Glasgow East/North East. Sighthill was consistently identified by practitioners as a locality of racial segregation due in part to the arrival of recipients of asylum Dispersal programmes. As one housing practitioner described:

> Sighthill … you [had] a mono-cultural, mono-low-income community … . We were all in this sort of little ghetto where … BME communities have been built … And then come these refugees, and asylum seekers from all these other countries (George, 2021, Housing Practitioner, Glasgow)

Expressed understandings of inclusivity by practitioners were shaped in Oldham and Glasgow East/North East by localised histories and broader narratives that racially stigmatised the two areas, with problematic segregation at the core of this stigmatisation (Jones 2013; McCall and Mooney 2018). Rather than recognising the vital role of anti-racist networks in housing access and experience identified in this article, the clustering of racially minoritised residents continued to be posed by practitioners in the two sites as a problem that required distinct policy solutions. The policy device of racial 'mixing' was thus identified by practitioners as the appropriate institutional response to the assumed problematic 'segregation' amongst racially minoritised residents:

> Loads of work has gone in to … create those mixes … That just creates moments and opportunities for people to just be together as normal people … break down those stereotypes and those barriers or those kind of historical views … That's where it really has an impact, the stuff we do (Simon, 2021, Housing Practitioner, Oldham)

However, the depiction of who is responsible for, and targeted by, 'social mixing' initiatives has been critiqued as a process that racialises specific people and places (Beebeejaun 2022; Slater and Anderson 2012). Practitioners based in Glasgow East/North East and Oldham operated within such institutional rationales by continually problematising existing forms of racialised communities and stigmatising residents as lacking integration. The spatial concentration of racially minoritised residents was perceived by housing practitioners as a result of a lack of confidence and their reluctance to broaden their experiences, rather than an outcome of institutional whiteness, and the obscuring of the racialised inequalities that shape the housing experience. Obstacles to racial 'mixing' were understood as inter-personal racism between 'white' residents and those minoritised, rather than institutional housing allocation policies. As has been well-established in the literature (Meer 2022; Mills 2007), where acknowledged, racism was located by the providers interviewed as embedded in the behaviours of 'white'

residents, operating independently from institutional activities. Oliver works for a local housing association in Oldham, and draws on his perceptions of the racialised inequalities experienced by minoritised residents:

> There's probably a perception from the white community about incomers … "It's people coming in from outside that are stealing all these great [housing] options off people who've been here for much longer" … We all know that's not the reality – those of us who work in housing – but it's challenging that stubborn perception (Oliver, 2022, Housing Practitioner, Oldham)

Drawing on broader narratives of housing inclusivity, both in contemporary policy (HM Government 2022) and in historical initiatives (see Jones 2013; Kundnani 2007), obstacles to racial 'mixing' extended, in practitioners' imaginaries, beyond consideration of culture and behaviour; a lack of physical sites and venues to facilitate inter-personal interactions was also identified as a bedrock of presumed racial 'segregation':

> Where do those two [different 'racial'] backgrounds organically just meet and spend time and do an activity together? … So, when you look at some of the communities in Oldham, which were of a BME background, there's nothing which glues everything together where people just naturally mix (Mark, 2021, Housing Practitioner, Oldham)

In a context in which urban development is positioned in UK government discourse as the solution to inequality (HM Government 2022), residential clustering amongst racially minoritised residents was presumed to result partly from limited infrastructural investment in the two localities. As one Glasgow-based practitioner identified in reference to Sighthill: 'When the refugees came, they all seemed to come to a community which lacked everything … they had … no sort of place for young people to hang out' (Maria, Glasgow, 2021). One housing practitioner, Mark, had worked in the area of social housing management in London and Manchester. During our interview, he emphasised the role of urban development in constructing new spaces to facilitate racial mixing and urban development:

> Oldham hadn't really invested heavily really into a lot of its provision … So we didn't have a cinema … even basic things like a bowling alley, or a [restaurant] … You organically weren't meeting people of your age who might have similar interests, do similar things, in your own town … There's loads of development going on in Oldham and things like that. So, we've got the bowling, we've got the cinema now (Mark, 2021, Housing Practitioner, Oldham)

While minoritised residents emphasised place-based anti-racist solidarities as the essence of the local community, housing practitioners turned to building and commercial development as the solution to perceived problems of lack of ethnic mixing and integration. Although the housing policy contexts and localised histories varied between the two sites, the creation of 'mixed' communities was also mobilised as a method of inclusivity in Glasgow East/North East. Kerry worked for a local housing association in Glasgow East/North East and envisioned urban development as a device to instil inclusivity; she describes how changes to the built environment encourage social 'mixing' and tackle inter-personal racism:

> Regeneration is always something positive because it's kind of like breaking down this racism culture … there is a mixture of people now who are integrated in the area, therefore it's now difficult … to have that old type of racism (Kerry, 2021, Housing Practitioner, Glasgow)

Expressed understandings of racism thus remained located at the level of inter-personal interactions and cultural difference, obscuring its structural and institutional forms, and disguising potential issues of displacement and marginalisation. Similar narratives emerged in Oldham, where practitioners such as Amanda perceived regeneration and housing development as a method to facilitate integration: 'There's a lot that you can do with development … more covert than the people realise … a development that attracts … mixed demographic as well, because that is how you … build … integration' (Amanda, 2021, Housing Practitioner, Oldham). A culturalist diagnosis of racism is thus preserved in (white) institutional logics (Harries *et al.* 2019; Rhodes and Brown, 2019).

Conclusion

This article foregrounds a question infrequently considered at the research-policy interface: namely, whether racial inequalities remain engrained in housing policy, because of the normative function of an institutionalised whiteness. In being attentive to the racial assertions embedded in local housing policy rationale and implementation, this article has illuminated the impact of policy and practice in the lives of racially minoritised residents in stigmatised localities. This includes how urban restructuring and local housing strategies can be mutually intertwined in white institutional imaginaries, extending prior knowledge in an area of research that is hitherto under-explored.

Particularly, three mechanisms of racialised housing governance have been elaborated: processes of racialisation and racism in housing allocation systems that result in rendering racially minoritised residents vulnerable and invisible; the devaluing of anti-racist knowledge and resultant undermining of existing networks of solidarity; and institutional imaginaries that situate the problem as localised separateness (segregation) and inter-personal racism with solutions of social mixing and infrastructure development mobilised in response. We argue that these mechanisms constitute a form of (white) institutional ignorance.

A series of implications for future research and current housing practice arise from this paper. Whilst the causes of (and solutions to) inequality are often cited in central government policy as locally-based (see Byrne *et al.*, 2022; Finney *et al.* 2019), place-based histories, macro-level policy, dominant representations of neighbourhoods, and localised understandings of communities have been shown to be inflected by institutional forms of whiteness. Whilst further research is required to understand how practitioners navigate institutional whiteness, the extent to which institutional reflexivity is practiced in contexts of institutional ignorance offers a fruitful avenue for future investigation. Institutional strategies that prioritise localised forms of knowledge, value existing solidarities amongst minoritised residents, and encourage practitioners to identify structural racism as a root cause of inequality are proposed as potential devices to further counteract forms of institutional ignorance. However, in a context where substantive recognition of racial inequality is delegitimised (Byrne *et al.*, 2020; Meer 2020a), resource constraints are entrenched locally as a result of austerity agendas (Berg 2019), and access to supplementary funding requires racialised and classed narrations of place as marginal (ised) and deprived (Harries *et al.* 2019), institutional capacity to initiate such reflexivity and lateral agency as a means to instil racial equality may remain constrained.

Note

1. The UK Census is a large-scale survey consisting of all households and people that is undertaken once every ten years. The release of demographic data (Glasgow) as part of the Scottish Census has been delayed, hence the inclusion of 2011 statistics.

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