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'Marginalised formalisation': an analysis of the in/formal binary through shifting policy and everyday experiences of 'poor' housing in South Africa

This paper contributes to global debates over the in/formal binary through an analysis of the South African state's provision of formal housing to residents previously living informally or insecurely. Focusing on cases within the cities of eThekwini and Msunduzi, it uses a mix of empirical data from housing beneficiaries and government officials alongside an analysis of documents to examine the processes and experiences of housing formalisation. The paper makes two key contributions. The first is to argue for a stronger focus on the *processes* of dichotomisation of the in/formal binary. It illustrates the significance of a processual analysis by examining shifts in South African housing policy and residents' expectations of housing gain, noting a situation of *hyperbole*, where informal housing is regarded as unacceptable, to one of *waning*, where policy statements acknowledge a greater role for informality. The second contribution is to direct analysis to the idea of *formal* housing and processes of formalisation, as these have arguably received less attention in wider debates. The paper proposes the concept of *marginalised formalisation* to articulate both the shortcomings experienced by residents living in formal housing and also the misrepresentation of housing policy and government rhetoric of the benefits of formalisation. Marginalised formalisation is contextualised within ongoing urban poverty which frames this reality.

Keywords: informal housing, formalisation, poverty, binary, lived experiences

Introduction

Troubling the dichotomies between in/formal, in/formality, and in/formalisation has been the focus of much recent global critical scholarship within urban studies, planning and housing (Banks et al., 2019; Boudreau and Davis, 2017; Lombard and Huxley, 2011; McFarlane, 2012; Porter, 2011; Roy and Alsayyad, 2004; Schmid et al., 2018; Song, 2016; van Gelder, 2013; and Verloo, 2017). Querying the presumed stark distinctions between these categories, in both theoretical and empirical terms, has evidenced their interconnected and relational qualities (Boudreau and Davis, 2017; Lemanski, 2009), generating a variety of complex ways of reconceptualising these concepts, particularly that of informality (McFarlane, 2012; Roy, 2009; Roy and Alsayyad, 2004). Scholars have also challenged the politico-spatial practices of state responses to informality, including evictions, upgrading and legalisation (McFarlane,

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2012; Porter, 2011; Roy, 2009 and van Gelder, 2013). Alongside this, there is substantive urban scholarship working to understand urban change and interventions in conditions of extreme inequality and poverty (Anand and Rademacher, 2011; Parnell and Robinson, 2012; Robinson, 2008; Schmid et al., 2018; and Watson, 2013). Finally, efforts to understand the contextualised and lived experiences of urban residents including how these shape interpretations of the significance of urban change (Schmid et al., 2018; Watson, 2014) are increasingly identified as critical to good urban scholarship.

This paper contributes to these varied debates in two key ways. Its arguments work across the canvas of the socio-spatial and economic inequalities of post-apartheid South Africa, where a significant state-driven housing programme is underway, providing 'free' formal housing to previously informally or poorly housed beneficiaries. The paper uses a mix of empirical data from housing beneficiaries and government officials alongside an analysis of press statements and policy documents to examine the processes and experiences of housing formalisation. As its first contribution, the paper returns to the question of in/formal dichotomisation and the binary this produces. It acknowledges the relational qualities of the dichotomy, but argues for a stronger interrogation of *processes* of dichotomisation, following Boudreau and Davis' 2017 processual approach to informalisation that emphasises an examination of processes rather than objects (Boudreau and Davis, 2017, 154). It achieves this through a twin focus on *hyperbole* and *waning* in relation to South African housing policy on the one hand, and residents' expectations of housing gain on the other. The second contribution is through the targeting of the ideas of *formal* housing and *formalisation*, arguing they have received less direct analysis in the above theoretical debates. The paper proposes the concept of *marginalised formalisation* to articulate the shortcomings (or misrepresentations) of ideas of formalisation present in housing policy and government rhetoric when considered in relation to residents' lived experiences of living in formal contexts in conditions of severe poverty and inequality. This concept resonates with research on the receipt of state housing or mechanisms to legalise previously informal housing elsewhere in contexts of poverty, which points to the challenges, but also the potential dangers and risks, of formal housing for beneficiaries (McFarlane, 2012; van Gelder, 2013).

The paper's structure is as follows: it opens with a brief critical analysis of debates around in/formal dichotomisation and formalisation and develops the concept of marginalised formalisation. It then presents an overview of South Africa's housing policy illustrating an early overstatement of the distinction between in/formality, namely the practice of hyperbole. This section also introduces the voices of residents who have lived informally, illustrating their embrace of this binary. The paper then shifts in focus to explore policy changes representing a softening or waning of the distinction, a result of wider challenges to housing delivery. The realities of living in formal housing in contexts where poverty persists are then explored, primarily from residents' perspectives but including the views of housing officials responsible for

delivering formal housing. This section of the paper develops an empirically driven understanding of the concept of marginalised formalisation by identifying important distinctions in formal housing (in contrast to informal), but evidencing key elements of marginality, largely associated with affordability, spatial constraints, social changes and poor build quality. The paper concludes by arguing that marginalised formalisation reveals the relational nature of the in/formal dichotomy. Experiences of formal housing are significantly shaped by poverty. This reality impedes the achievement of the state's previously envisioned 'high quality living environment' (see Table 1 below). The concept also illustrates the processual nature of dichotomisation, from hyperbole to waning, and from experiences of marginalisation when living informally to living in formal housing. It thereby challenges the in/formal binary, and undermines normative assumptions which subsume particular positive outcomes, including decency and wider social changes, within formalisation.

Processes of in/formal dichotomisation and the lived experiences of marginalised formalisation as a site of critical analysis

In the fields of urban studies and planning, and that of housing, the concepts and assumed dichotomies of in/formal, in/formality and in/formalisation have benefited from extensive scrutiny and critique (Roy, 2009). Definitions of Informal/ity/isation are commonly phrased as problematic and derogatory, whether referring to spatial, economic or political forms and practices, or to an urban condition more broadly. Within planning and housing policy, this pejorative framing is frequently accompanied by the call for formalisation (Lombard and Huxley, 2011, 124; Porter, 2011, 119). Discourses of informality (and practices of formalisation) are frequently employed to justify urban planning changes and the implementation of particular housing policy agendas (McFarlane, 2012; Roy and Alsayyad, 2004; van Gelder, 2013), including legalisation and eradication and relocation of settlements, often to the detriment of the urban poor. Here the dichotomisation underpins particular 'governmental tool[s]', which give rise to a 'politics of formalisation' (McFarlane, 2012, 91–92). It is these (unequal) politics, which have formed the essence of much critical scholarship regarding formalisation's role in 'restructuring property relations' (Porter, 2011, 118), and a widening of inequality (McFarlane, 2012; Roy, 2011). The politics of formalisation devalue informality as an urban condition and informal housing as a spatial practice, with the former defined as a nuisance and illegitimate (McFarlane, 2012). Yet the politics of formalisation are complex. This paper argues that in the South African case, because of the history of racially determined Apartheid dispossession, informality as a way of living and informal housing specifically, are 'overstated' as illegitimate in the post-apartheid era. This 'practice of hyperbole' emerges from the

desire to distance the new developmental state from the appalling consequences of apartheid policy, acknowledging that for many, living informally was often the only way to gain an urban foothold during Apartheid. However, the illegitimacy of informality is also about recognising the poverty realities of the citizen majority. The daily experiences of many residents living in informal settlements are tied to poverty in multiple ways, including a lack of access to services and employment: residents also face discrimination based around their living conditions (Meth, 2009).

Critical scholarship also points to the interconnected, relational and processual nature of the in/formal binary (Boudreau and Davis, 2017). Roy calls for informality to be viewed 'as an idiom of urbanization' (Roy, 2011, 233) and McFarlane (2012) conceptualises both as forms of practice, emphasising their co-constitution but also noting their distinction. In McFarlane's analysis, their relationality is critical, recognising their provisional and changing natures, requiring a sensitivity to the temporalities of in/formality. In this, and the work of Boudreau and Davis (2017), the 'how' and the 'quality' of in/formality rather than the 'what' or quantity of it, is placed centre-stage. It is here that the 'processes and mechanisms' of in/formality are argued to be of critical significance (Boudreau and Davis, 2017, 154), presented in their work through a 'processual approach to informalization'. A focus on process is applicable to any aspect of the in/formal dichotomy (Boudreau and Davis, 2017). Much of the urban scholarship cited in this paper emphasises the informal (and informalisation) in its analyses. This is because this 'nuisance other' is often poorly theorised or lacking recognition. This paper however deliberately focuses on the processes of *formalisation* arising from the in/formal dichotomy. It argues that its significance in relation to post-apartheid South African urban and housing policy is central to a political and processual analysis of a developmental state, but also that strong analyses of formalisation should include or account for the lived experiences of housing beneficiaries. Here a relational analysis of formalisation alongside urban marginality provides new insights into the ways in which the in/formal dichotomy transforms over time, moving from practices and processes of hyperbole, to waning, and from marginalisation within informal living, to that of marginalised formalisation.

Two typical approaches of programmes of housing formalisation in South Africa are evident. The first is *in situ*, which involves the wholesale removal of prior informal structures, and associated rudimentary services, and the physical redesign and new build of a formal settlement characterised by features such as plot demarcation, formal top structures, services, roads and access routes. Legal procedures to endorse the private ownership of properties results after allocation has occurred, with original residents usually prioritised as beneficiaries. However, new plots are commonly not in identical locations to previous plots. The second is the relocation of residents from informal settlements to newly constructed formal housing on what was previously green-field land. The razing of structures and the conversion of land to other uses usually occurs

in these cases. Clearly, formalisation in South Africa restructures property relations, and casts residents into roles of owner, landlord and beneficiary, but these processes occur within complex developmental agendas tied to welfarist ambitions of both the state and its citizens (Parnell and Robinson, 2012; Venter et al., 2015) alongside asset-acquisition agendas. Urban planning has used normative critiques of informality to justify eradications underscored by deeply unequal historical and current power relations. The contemporary housing programme has generally prioritised home ownership over other less individualised tenures, although some efforts towards developing social rented housing are evident. Meanwhile, the peripheral locations of many 'relocation' housing projects have undermined residents' employment opportunities, placing many at a locational disadvantage, a further feature of marginalised formalisation. Yet arguably many urban poor have benefited from gaining access to, and ownership of, formal housing as a personal and financial asset and a key welfare intervention (Venter et al., 2015).

This paper employs the wider literature's critical recognition of the role of in/formality in underpinning core planning interventions, as well as critiques of the persistence of the in/formality binary, as an analytical context; however, it also works to focus attention on the lived experiences of processes of formalisation through the concept of *marginalised formalisation*. This framing reveals how formalisation is tied, in complicated ways, to conceptions of wider changing socio-economic relations summed up by the notion of 'decency', a descriptor employed by the South African state (Sisulu, 2008) to describe qualities of formal housing, and by extension those who inhabit it, and their ways of being. But 'decency' is also signalled intellectually as a trope tied to respectability alongside 'the materialization of terrible histories of oppression' (Ross, 2015, S101, S99). Importantly, it is the contextualised and lived experiences of post-apartheid beneficiaries which underpins this analysis of marginalised formalisation through a socio-material examination of housing change. This occurs through an overview of the broader housing policy context in South Africa, followed by an analysis of the hyperbole and waning dichotomisation of in/formal housing and in/formalisation; and concludes with an exploration of the social, economic and material factors underpinning processes of marginalised formalisation.

Hyperbole: housing policy (and residents' voices) as 'war against shacks'

In the early 2000s, an overstated distinction between informal versus formal housing typified approaches to informal housing through urban policy in South Africa, with state discourse adopting divergent definitions of both. This influenced around two decades of state responses to housing delivery, focused on the eradication of

informal housing evidenced by the national Ministry sentiment 'our war against shacks' (Sisulu, 2004) and the construction of new formal neighbourhoods, in part through a massive state subsidised housing programme. The city of eThekwini (Durban) took up this 'war' with arguably greater vigour,[1] setting 2014 as their date for eradication, yet by then, the municipal government acknowledged this objective was unachievable, and that such an approach to housing may only achieve eradication by 2050 or later. The resultant agreement was that although its planning and policy focus would still be eradication, it would incorporate an 'interim service programme' (providing basic services) for those living informally and not specifically earmarked for relocation. This signalled an appreciation of the role played by informal settlements to house residents in the city, alongside recognition of the slowness of delivering formal housing units, and the desire to improve all residents' quality of life. However, the experiences of residents who have already been moved from informal to formal housing in the city point to the persistence of experiences of poverty across informal and formal housing, as well as the mixed outcomes of being formally housed in what are often poor quality forms of housing. This persistence of poverty has multiple origins but one key explanation is the lack of clear integration in national policy of poverty reduction strategies with the housing programme. Formal housing was stated as contributing to asset accumulation, but the mechanics of this were not clearly articulated (Tissington, 2011). Despite these critiques, this paper situates its analysis firmly within the symbolic, cultural and historical meaning of housing in South Africa. In this context the meanings and 'values' (see McFarlane, 2012) associated with informality (and hence formality) are bound up with South Africa's history of apartheid disenfranchisement (with the loss of citizenship and lack of rights to live in the city) and a genuine desire by the state to overcome and respond to these historical inequities. The paper briefly details the process of hyperbolic dichotomisation of in/formal housing policy in South Africa.

Housing policy in South Africa in the post-apartheid era is dynamic, changing over the decades since the ANC government came into power. It has been widely evaluated and critiqued by housing experts (see Charlton, 2018; DHS, 2015; Cross, 2013; Tissington et al., 2013; Huchzermeyer, 2011; Charlton and Kihato, 2006; and Zack and Charlton, 2003), and this paper's aim is not to revisit this literature. Instead, the focus here is on the discursive binary (informal-formal housing) that was embraced by particular elements of the state in the earlier post-apartheid years in response to housing, and used to reference and inform policy approaches to informal housing. The paper interrogates the substance and implications of such a binary.

In the post-apartheid era (1994 onwards), two significant housing policies are evident. The first is the White Paper on Housing (RSA, 1994) which set out the new

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1   The KwaZulu-Natal Elimination and Prevention of Re-Emergence of Slums Act No. 6 of 2007 could be identified as a key moment in this war (discussed below).

government's ambitious strategy to deliver one million houses within their first five years of office using various approaches including a subsidy scheme for those who qualified to become homeowners to gain access to formal housing provided by a private developer. Initially the policy focused on delivering a 'starter home', which might include materials, land and costs of services (see Charlton and Kihato, 2006, 254) which residents could then extend themselves over time. However, the policy very quickly shifted to delivering a minimum 30 m² top structure that then had to meet particular minimum standards (Tissington, 2011, 61). Here the delivery of a formal housing structure was privileged, responding to growing criticisms levelled at the new government of the types of housing opportunities being provided to the poor: 'This policy adjustment, [was] driven by a political need to deliver acceptable houses' (Charlton and Kihato, 2006, 267). However Charlton and Kihato (2006) explain that the needs of the poor were often overlooked as policy and implementation were shaped by wider political as well as internal pressures and needs for 'pragmatism, workability and feasibility' (2006, 275). In May 2004, the then President Mbeki emphasised the need for poverty alleviation more broadly within his State of the Nation Address. Lindiwe Sisulu, the Minister for Housing,[2] then identified the second housing policy of Breaking New Ground (adopted in 2004) as particularly significant for achieving poverty alleviation (Charlton and Kihato, 2006) although as is revealed later, this has proved a largely elusive aim. In essence, this policy was an amendment to the White Paper, which introduced a detailed plan to implement its policies in order to achieve sustainable human settlements (Tissington, 2011, 21). Along with the introduction of the term 'sustainable human settlements' (arguably influenced by international debates, see Charlton and Kihato, 2006), a growing focus on quality of housing is evident (Charlton and Kihato, 2006, 257). In speeches that follow around this time, there is evidence of 'an energetic focus on the eradication of existing informal settlements and, presumably, those that are formed in future' (Charlton and Kihato: 2006, 258). Various public speeches by Minister Sisulu (in office from 2004–2009 and 2014–2018) evidence this, illustrating an overstated or hyperbolic distinction between informal and formal housing: 'our war against shacks' (Sisulu, 2004); '[a] belief in any form of informality distorts […] the values of equality and dignity for all' (Sisulu, 2006) and '[we must] create a country where slums are eradicated and in their place, decent, secure communities are created where our children can grow up in dignity' (Sisulu, 2008).

The origins for such a focus on eradication emerge from a misreading of the 2000 Millennium Development Goal (Huchzermeyer, 2007, 7, 11) which focused on improving the lives of slum dwellers: 'President Mbeki has mandated the national Department of Housing to work towards achieving "shack-free cities"' (Huchzer-

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2   Note the Ministry was later renamed Department of Human Settlements.

meyer, 2007, n.p.). The anti-slum/eradication sentiment projected a very particular interpretation of informality, extending and concretising the discursive gulf between informal and formal. This worked to denigrate informality, justifying its eradication, while also explicitly celebrating formality and the properties of formal housing. It is also evident that the national housing policy Breaking New Ground contained contradictory and 'confusing' approaches to informality and contained wider possible responses to responding to the housing needs of the urban poor than simply that of eradication and formalisation through individual ownership of housing. Charlton and Kihato (2006) identify instruments in support of upgrading programmes, and provision of communal services (2006, 258).

Nevertheless, Minister Sisulu's intentions permeated down to regional and municipal governments, including those of the region of KwaZulu-Natal, through the proposal of a new legal tool, the Elimination and Prevention of Re-emergence of Slums Act (2007) by the Provincial Government of KwaZulu-Natal.[3] This legal instrument initially identified 2014 as the target date for slum eradication (Huchzermeyer, 2007), shaping the objectives of the eThekwini and Msunduzi municipalities which lie within KwaZulu-Natal.[4] Table 1 summarises the language of this acute binary. Evidence of hyperbole repeats across a host of policy documents drawing on social, material, moral and economic descriptors, which convey the assumed divide between informal 'shaky edifices' versus formal 'suburbs'. Policy statements employ these contrasting descriptors through references to various facets of housing including: services and infrastructure of houses and their wider settlements, notions of rights, citizenship and decency pertaining to beneficiaries and their families, broader social ideas and ideals of family, of styles of parenting and of children's rights. These factors contrast the positive social and material significance and outcomes of formal housing, and by extension, denigrate informality for family living. Table 1 draws on a range of municipal, provincial and national government statements, speeches and newsletters. It reveals the ways in which the binary divisions between formal and informal are entrenched through the discourses and narratives employed, drawing powerful normative inferences, which suggest housing forms are readily distinguishable.

3   There was much contestation over this Act and there is little evidence that other provinces have followed in adopting such a draconian approach to informal housing.
4   This Act was judged unconstitutional on 14 October 2009 by the South African Constitutional Court, after protest by local organisations (Selmeczi, 2011, 60).

Table 1   The entrenchment of binaries, an analysis of state discourse

Informal	Formal
Indecent	Decent, hygienic, dignity, secure
Informal	High quality living environment
Shack settlement, 'shaky edifices'	Self-sustaining 'suburbs'
Inhumane / sub-human living conditions, squalor and danger	Families live in comfort and security, a new dawn for families
Poverty	Equality, right to live where they choose, a caring society, reverse humiliating disempowerment
Insecurity	Full title
Impoverished families	Community
Small, overcrowded, dirty, dense, unhygienic, life threatening environments	Proper, new, serviced, luxuries
Lacking proper infrastructure	Running water (for mothers), electricity, transport, roads, lighting, playing fields, crèches and social centres

Source: Durban Government (2003a; 2003b; 2004; 2010); Mchunu (2009); Mlaba (2007); Sisulu (2004; 2006; 2008)

This entrenchment of binaries distinguishing between formal and informal is however not unique to discourses of the state. In the second part of this paper, the challenges and realities of living in formal housing within formal settlements are considered, but first evidence from residents of existing and former informal settlements illustrates the connections and shared discourses between the state and residents around the symbolic meaning of informal housing within informal settlements. This recognition of the voices and experiences of residents as contributing to (as well as challenging) binary discourses is important because much academic critique of the construction and politics of this binary focuses solely on the articulations of the state, and rather less on how residents express, conceptualise or experience a binary.

Data from three projects focusing on housing change in and around eThekwini city (Durban), and a fourth project extending the focus to include the city of Msunduzi (formerly known as Pietermartizburg)[5] is used to illustrate residents' lived experiences of both informality and formalisation. These draw on a mix of interviews, focus groups, diaries and drawing as well as the analysis of policy documents and press releases. The focus in eThekwini is Cato Crest, an area of rapidly formalising housing which falls within the greater settlement of Cato Manor, well located within 7 km of the city centre of eThekwini. Within Msunduzi the focus is Ambleton, a poor and peripherally located area of new state housing to the south of the city. The first two

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5   This inland city lies around 80km west of eThekwini and is an important secondary city and regional capital of KwaZulu Natal.

projects focused on Cato Crest: one in 2000 explored thirty women's experiences of violence in informal housing, with the second in 2007 examining twenty men's experiences of violence and housing. In 2011, parenting experiences of twenty former informal residents now living in new formal housing were analysed, focusing on Cato Crest and Ambleton. Finally, in 2013 a project examined trends in domestic violence and housing change with nine women living in formal housing in Cato Crest. Interviews were also conducted with key informants in all projects, including committee representatives, the police and housing officers. In Cato Crest, a large programme of *in situ* rehousing of residents had occurred from 2010 onwards. In Msunduzi research work concentrated on the peri-urban settlement of Ambleton where some participants had been re-housed in 1991 from various different locations in the region (prior to the fall of apartheid) into new state (RDP)[6] housing[7] (10 m² houses) following a period of regional political violence. Other residents moved into the area after 1994, accommodated in larger state houses (30 m²) as size norms changed (see Goebel, 2015, 16 for details on the histories of movement into housing in this area).

Data from these projects reveals that residents (in Cato Crest in Durban)[8] also employed binaries in expressions of anger/hope about their particular living spaces (before allocation of formal state housing),[9] and their language parallels that used by the state:

> Informal settlements are destroying the lives of young people. (Siboniso[10] ♂ Diary, Cato Crest, 2007)

> If the government can build us proper houses, we can call them homes not shacks… Living in a shack means you can't even clean the house properly because everything is crammed together. (♀ Cato Crest focus group, 2000)

> I think if all *mjondolos*[11] are gone from Cato Crest [it] will be a good area to live [in]. (Aphiwe, ♀, focus group, Cato Crest, 2013)

6   RDP housing is a non-specific term encapsulating state provided housing built in the post-apartheid era. Its name refers to the original Reconstruction and Development Programme of the national ANC government, introduced in 1994 with a strong poverty reduction focus. Despite this programme being 'scrapped' in 1996 the term persists and is used colloquially to describe the multitude of new state provided housing which has appeared across the country. Its persistence is indicative of the powerful significance of the programme in offering both material improvements as well as citizenship to a historically excluded population.

7   Sibongile Buthelezi provided research assistance on the second, third and fourth project, and Tamlyn Fleetwood on the second.

8   See Goebel (2015, 55, 59) for similar dire descriptions of informal living in Msunduzi illustrating the significance of the lived experiences of informality in shaping analyses of the in/formal binary.

9   The settlement of Cato Crest is largely but not entirely formalised through *in situ* upgrading.

10 All residents' names are pseudonyms.

11 This is a local term for shack house.

Residents' negative interpretations of informality contrasted with formal housing should be recognised within academic analyses, given their basis in lived experiences of both housing quality and policy rhetoric. They reveal the complexities of state/society intersections and the subtle influences of inflammatory policy rhetoric. Additionally they evidence how the state's normative inferences about informality are not necessarily poorly conceived, or purely externally constructed. Rather, they illustrate shared cultural understandings, which deem informality as unacceptable, tied as it is to histories of marginalisation and political exclusion (Goebel, 2015, 55). Importantly, the realities of informality can be deeply scarring and unsatisfying for residents although this paper recognises that residents also hold positive views of living informally for other complex reasons.

Waning: shifting policy approaches to in/formality

Following this period of hyperbole, the language around the informal/formal binary has more recently begun to shift and the 'absoluteness' of the pathology of informality has subsided as a result, both at the national and municipal level. Nationally the housing programme increasingly emphasises the provision of services, integrated development and housing, rather than simply a focus on eradication (see Kota-Fredericks, 2013). This is presumably a function of economic and implementation constraints (Cross, 2013, 239) and a growing realisation that formal housing delivery targets (despite the numbers already delivered) cannot be met and were always unrealistic in a context of growing budgetary constraints and other political pressures. In addition, despite the impressive delivery rates, informal settlements have continued to grow in the 2000s: 300 recorded informal settlements were identified in South Africa in 1994, rising to more than 2,700 in 2011 (Department for Human Settlements, 2011 cited in Cross, 2013, 239). Reasons behind this growth are complex, relating to the substantial backlog of housing tied to ongoing rural to urban migration, shifts towards smaller household sizes as well as rising numbers of residents who narrowly fail to meet the criteria for the housing subsidy.[12] Additionally informal housing persists within formal settlements, and undercounting of this form of housing is likely.

Each year, all cities in South Africa are required to publish their annual Integrated Development Plan (IDP). These plans establish strategic overviews for urban planning and budget approval, but they also provide cities an opportunity to revise their objectives and reframe decisions taken in the past. The City Vision for eThekwini municipality (evidenced through their IDPs) over the past decade was not one which privi-

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12   For example, Ndinda et al (2011) argue that the proportion of the very poor (earning below R5000 per month) living informally has declined between 2005 and 2009, yet over this same time period, those earning just over R5000 have seen a proportional rise in informal living (2011, 779). This group of residents have been unable to access the housing subsidy, but cannot afford housing credit from other sources.

leged formal housing over informal housing as an *aesthetic* feature of their 'modern' city to the detriment of quality of life. This contrasts claims elsewhere, such as in relation to the destruction of slums in Delhi, India on the grounds that they contravene the city's world class aesthetic (Ghertner, 2011, 280). In eThekwini Municipality, for various political reasons (Robinson, 2008, 83), the city vision, is not to be a world-class city (unlike Johannesburg), but rather one which expresses the arguably more progressive aim of 'Africa's most caring and liveable city' (eThekwini municipality, 2013, 8; 2018, 203). This draws on the language of social justice (eThekwini municipality, 2018, 83) to inform decision making meaning that 'service delivery and quality of life remained high on the political agenda' (Robinson, 2008, 83). The city also emphasises its aim to produce 'homely neighbourhoods' (eThekwini municipality, 2013, 76) as part of their municipal vision. Similarly, the city of Msunduzi aspires to being a 'safe, vibrant city' with its IDP label 'city of choice' (Msunduzi municipality, 2017) emphasising learning, living, raising a family, working, playing and doing business, in that order.

In terms of approaches to informal housing, in the 2013/2014 Review of the IDP, the eThekwini municipality recognised the impracticability of plans to achieve eradication by 2014 describing this as 'not achievable' and that given 'current [rates of] delivery of approximately 7,400 [houses] pa it will take until 2048' (eThekwini municipality, 2013, Annexure 7, 311). By 2018, the city had once again recalibrated its implementation targets in view of its assessment of the number of informal houses within the city, the rate of housing provision, the projected population growth rate and assumptions about the rollout of funding and subsidies. It notes the backlog as 387,000 and predicts delivery ranges of 4,000–6,000 per annum, with a time period of forty to eighty years (eThekwini municipality, 2018, 83).

Similarly, using the language of slum clearance, the Msunduzi municipality in its 2013–2014 IDP prioritises the '100% eradication of informal settlements' and calculates its housing backlog as 6,858 houses, noting the presence of seventy-five different informal settlements within the municipality with 15,817 structures (Msunduzi municipality, 2013, 14, 61, 63). By the time of the publication of its 2017 IDP, the municipality, despite still prioritising the 100 per cent eradication of informal settlements (2017, 24), had shifted its focus onto an upgrading strategy. This classified settlements 'based on [their] severity of informality and perceived urgency of intervention' indicating only twenty-eight of the now seventy settlements were candidates for relocation owing to their absolute lack of services (2017, 130) and only around one-fifth were categorised as 'slum clearance' projects (2017, 132). This attenuated approach to informal housing evidences a waning of the in/formality dichotomy and a recognition of the role of informality in urban life.

In eThekwini in 2013, and again in 2018, the delivery of *formal* housing remains key to the achievement of these 'homely neighbourhoods', achieved through the eradication of informal settlements which persists as a strategy (see the 2010 IDP, eThek-

wini municipality, 2010, 94) to deal with backlogs. However, similarly to Msunduzi, a much stronger emphasis on interim services is evident in both 2013 and 2018 (eThekwini Municipality, 2013, 157; 2018, 321). The 2018 IDP signals further policy shifts. It emphasises the upgrading of informal settlements alongside a focus on eradication; the latter term is used infrequently in the 2018 IDP. Instead, 'upgrading and service provision are a priority' of their programme (2018, 314). By 2019, the eThekwini municipality website flags the city's priority 'to upgrade informal settlements where they are currently located' (eThekwini municipality, 2019).

These signal key transformations in conceptualising informality and the role it plays within residents' lives and the city more broadly: 'as part of the solution to urbanization challenges' (Sutherland et al., 2018, 342). It also evidences dichotomisation as a process rather than a static spatial 'thing' and teases open the label and concept of 'informal', revealing multiple contingent and complex processes shaping how informality is framed. The process of formalisation forms the focus of the final part of this paper. This reveals how the now-waning language of eradication and perceived differences between informal and formal housing rest on a binary, not necessarily evidenced through everyday experiences of living in formal housing.

Marginalised formalisation: lived experiences of formalisation in conditions of persistent poverty

Empirical realities of life in formal housing provided by the state subsidised programme in both eThekwini and Msunduzi municipalities illustrate that gaining 'homeliness' remains beyond the reach of many. The in/formal binary also fails to capture 'reality', neither corresponding with the lives of those in informal settlements or those in new housing. However, the discursive construction of this binary has great political purchase, as being seen to eradicate 'slums' and provide new housing is valuable given the symbolic significance of housing in the post-apartheid imagination of citizens. Processes of housing *formalisation* also subsume the outcome of *social* change, assuming the former will produce the latter, achieving community, decency, dignity and equality for residents and their families. Claims such as the promise of a 'new dawn for families' (see Table 1) evidence these aims. However, empirical analysis illustrates how projected social outcomes are undermined in contexts of persistent poverty, regardless of whether the context is formal or informal: 'There is a fine line between "upgrading" and the creation of new "poverty enclaves" and their formalisation in the built environment' (Ross, 2010, 205).

Although the housing programme is seen as an explicit strategy to combat poverty (Cross, 2013), its actual ability to achieve this is highly variable because of the ways in which housing intersects with employment patterns, spatial trends and differential needs at different stages of the lifecycle, which vary from city to city (Cross, 2013;

Goebel, 2015). The housing programme and wider poverty reduction strategies are poorly integrated, with 'a worrying lack of alignment between the current focus in government on the contribution of housing to poverty alleviation and the ability of housing policy to achieve these aims' (Tissington, 2011, 67). Persistent unemployment and under-employment shapes many residents' experiences of their new housing, made more significant by a number of other factors pertaining to the housing (size, quality and location for example). For many, their formal houses are of poor quality. The intersection of this with the existence of poverty structures the realities of everyday experiences and underscores the value of looking beyond informality to view the conceptual framing of marginalised formalisation as a site for critical analysis of everyday urban living.

There is limited research examining the everyday social changes relating to housing formalisation and the expected achievement of social outcomes such as decency, dignity and community (see Meth and Charlton, 2016; Goebel, 2015 in Msunduzi, Ross' 2010 work in Cape Town and Brown-Luthango, 2016 on crime and housing formalisation in Cape Town). These softer, qualitative changes are harder to evaluate than quantifiable material deliverables such as shelter, walls, water, plot size and the reduction of backlogs, but both are interconnected. The *quality* of material deliverables actively shapes the social experiences of living in these new houses, and thereby the ability to behave in ways that are deemed 'decent' by residents or that typify dignity as determined by the state.

Beneficiaries' experiences of formal state-provided housing are often positive but also mixed (Charlton, 2018; Zack and Charlton, 2003). Residents themselves are conflicted, as too are different residents within the same neighbourhood, meaning singular interpretations and evaluations are not possible. Based on the studies' empirical findings, there were a number of key positives. Flush toilets and access to water were often key service improvements, alongside electrification. The latter not only enabled lighting, cooking and the ability to purchase 'white' goods, but also improved safety in relation to fires, which is a critical practical and emotional gain, and enhanced the capacity to run small businesses. Improved physical structure provided more durable building materials; protection from the rain; gains in space; and privacy and clearer divisions of internal space for different uses. This in turn allowed space for the purchase of consumer items including furnishings and furniture, and also the capacity to host visitors and relatives. The enhanced safety and legibility of the settlement were also stressed: lockable doors and the ability to install burglar guards and gates secured individual properties, and clear passageways, house numbers and structured housing layouts reduced confusion and improved the ability to identify criminals. Finally, for some, a legitimate and formal address eased access to finance.

Residents derived significant emotional gains through formalisation, and for some, their belief that 'the houses are for families now not criminals' (Lethiwe, ♀ FG1, CC,

Figure 1   Fikile and her new house
Source: Meth (2011)

2013), evidences the state's intentions to produce 'homely neighbourhoods' (eThekwini municipality, 2013, 76). Formalisation was delivering gains in urban living.

> I am so happy to own the house as I'm living with my children only. If I'm thinking back to the informal settlement it was difficult if the rain comes. We were sleeping in one bed with girls and boys because we did not have the space. I appreciate what the government did to us. (Siyanda, ♀, FG1, CC, 2013)

> I feel happy now …there is a big difference, we smell fresh air not that smell of the toilet, rubbish and mud. Sickness has decreased especially TB … you can clean and stay clean. (Nester, ♀, FG1, CC2011)

> My status has changed now I feel less stressed… my sister [used to describe my shack as] the place of the animals not for the person who is alive. My status has changed because of the new house. (Fikile, ♀, FG1, CC, 2011) (See Figure 1)

These varied and significant positives underpin subsequent critiques of formalisation, revealing that housing is neither wholly negative nor positive, but a complex contradictory intersection and also a process, in part because of the prevailing social-economic realities (i.e. poverty) of urban living. Through formalisation, residents are experiencing, and creating through adaptation and other strategies (see Charlton, 2018), a semblance of urban inclusion in terms of gaining an asset and a foothold in the city. However, this is inevitably compromised, particularly in terms of reducing inequality (Anand and Rademacher, 2011). Corresponding access to secure employment has not occurred for many, thus residents are often living in formal housing in

situations of significant poverty. At times, the costs associated with formal living (rates, service charges) prove prohibitive. The paper turns now to explore various challenges of formal housing, analysed in terms of material conditions, social processes and economic impacts, all of which reveal the blurred boundaries between formal and informal housing experiences, the persistence of marginality and hence the significance of processes of marginalised formalisation.

Material conditions

Formal housing exhibited a complex range of material challenges primarily relating to its small size, poor construction, and for many, a lack of service connection. Poor internal layouts resulted in bathrooms and kitchens in close proximity to one another allowing odours from toilets to infiltrate areas of food preparation and consumption, viewed with disgust and frustration by residents (see Figure 2). Broken and poorly constructed windows and a reliance on shared external toilets, due to a persisting lack of internal piped water supplies for reasons that were unclear (despite the presence of a shower cubicle), were common. Many residents had been in this situation for several years (see Figure 2) (♀ focus group Cato Crest, 2013): 'if the stomach is running at night I [am] forced to use the bucket to release myself. I [am] forced to go outside alone at night to throw the bucket in the river as our houses [are] near the river' (Siyanda, ♀ focus group Cato Crest, 2013).

Several residents discussed their issues with plot size and quality (although it is recognised plot sizes are relatively generous compared with other contexts, e.g. India). Representatives of an Area Committee explained their frustration, citing the failure of government promises: 'we do not have enough space, the yard is too small, we cannot do that thing for "one home one garden" as the government said…[13] so that people will be able to grow something to eat' (Interview area committee representative, Cato Crest, 2013). Similarly, residents in Ambleton complained about the yard size, arguing this precluded growing food or having play space, criticising the promises of the state (Sipho, ♂ FG1, Ambleton, 2011). Small plot sizes also limit opportunities for hanging washing and for easily determining appropriate boundaries. The failure of construction companies to remove building rubble also impeded planting and gardening, reducing the quality and value of residents' plots. These material limitations of formal houses undermine their capacity to deliver economic, social and physical transformation. Residents anticipated progressive changes, not necessarily met through their accessing formal houses. These limitations were not exclusive to formal housing, as for many, conditions in informal housing were often substantially worse. What is impor-

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13   A policy statement corresponding to this belief has not been identified; its origin appears to relate to a politician's speech, but it is likely to refer to an elaboration of the dominant idea of the standalone housing on individual plots, which has characterised much of the housing delivery by the post-apartheid government (Tissington, 2011).
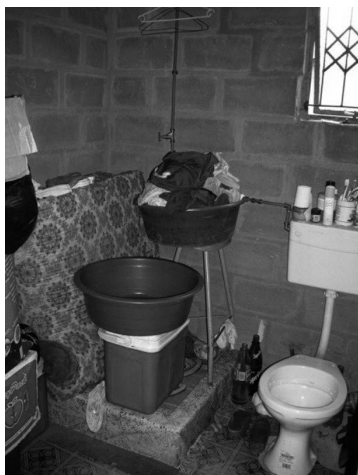
Figure 2   Bathroom with no internal water supply
Source: Meth (2013)

Figure 3   The bathroom is located behind this wall immediately adjacent to the kitchen
Source: Meth (2013)

tant, however, is the mismatch between the expectations and realities of formality, tied to deeper ideas of decency and the symbolic value of housing. While policy ideals are rarely fully realised in actual implementation, this mismatch becomes more important when the state celebrates formality and denigrates informal housing: the reality of living in poor quality formal housing challenged the dichotomy constructed through policy narratives.

Social processes

Small houses with inflexible layouts affected how residents socialised and engaged. In Cato Crest, Fikile lives in a 30 m² house with one bedroom. She explained: 'The problem I have in my new house is if someone comes early in the morning while my son is still sleeping in the kitchen, I normally ask that person to come near my bedroom window so that my talk will not interrupt my son' (Fikile, ♀ FG1, CC, 2011). Bongani agrees: 'Development came with difficulties for the people', and he cites the cost of services, lack of privacy in the new housing and the decline in numbers of rooms as key negatives (Bongani, ♂ FG2, CC, 2011). These realities countered the expectations of homeliness, amplified by the lack of facilities for children in the formalised settlements.

Residents also explained that they had suffered a decline in community relations after moving into formal housing. Jabulani who lived in the shack settlement for ten years laments: 'Development comes with separating people from being united… people were friendly [in the shacks] compared to where we are living now' (Jabulani, ♂ FG2, CC, 2011).

> We were very close with neighbours while we were living in the mjondolo and now that united-as-neighbours [has] disappeared… We are not sharing food and talk as we do at mjondolo. (Lethiwe, ♀ FG1, CC, 2013)

This concern about the negative impact of development was also identified by residents in Ambleton, Msunduzi who identified the absolute decline in the sense of community in the area with the construction of RDP houses, as well as a rise in crime: 'The crime started after development came' (Lindeni, ♀ FG1, Ambleton, 2011). This complex observation is not easily explainable (although see Meth and Buthelezi, 2017 for a more detailed analysis of the impact of formalisation on crime). Communal life within informal settlements must not be over-romanticised, yet evidently community ties and perceptions of safety are informed by the materiality and politics of informality. These might be dismantled by formalisation, or at the very least by relocation and the loss of former neighbours (Davy and Pellissery, 2013, s80–s81): 'We don't move with your neighbours from the shacks. We don't know each other, that is [another thing which is] creating jealousy' (Jabulani ♂ FG2, CC, 2011). These frustrations relate back to South Africa's housing allocation process, which does not provide an opportunity for community engagement but rather relies on local community structures under the elected Ward Councillor, a process open to potential abuse and hence discontent.

Residents in Ambleton received very early forms of state housing (some as small as 10 m²) to replace mud housing that they had built (noting here that these very small houses were not nationally representative).[14] The mud housing was unstable, but often consisted of three to four rooms. This room size declined with the provision of new state housing down to one or two rooms maximum. Residents have to separate spaces (kitchens and bedrooms) using curtaining to gain privacy. Parents felt this had serious implications for the early sexualisation of children (see Meth, 2013) as well as fostering a sense of shame: 'The houses are very small for the families, that is why the children behave like that because they learn from the parent' (Siphiwe, ♂ FG1, Ambleton, 2011). Siphiwe illustrated his previous mud house as consisting of three bedrooms in contrast to his new one-roomed RDP home with space for a bed in the top left hand corner (see Figure 3). This concern about the lack of privacy for parents parallels similar concerns identified in Cato Crest (Meth, 2013). Loss of privacy is a fundamental social issue for parents. It is a core social concern shaping decency and their ability to promote decency in their children. The housing layout mitigates against residents' realisation of decency, reducing also the homeliness of their properties. Additionally, small house size has health implications: 'According to health, I think to sleep and cook in the same house is not a good thing' (Sipho, ♂ FG, Ambleton, 2011).

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14   The funding structures at this time meant that only small houses could be delivered, and these core units were never viewed by the state as 'finished' homes.
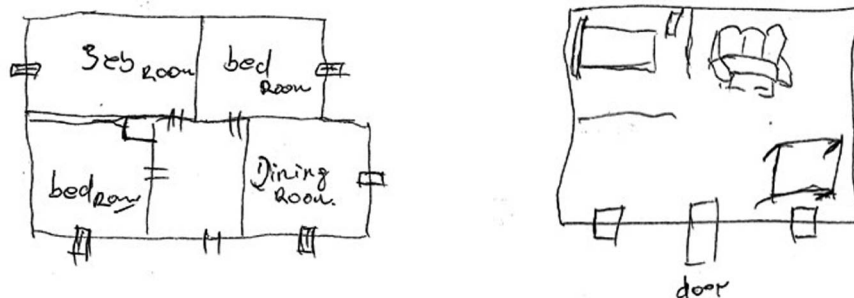
Figure 4   Siphiwe's old and new houses
Source: Siphiwe, male, Ambleton (pseudonym)

Male residents also pointed out that after twenty years of establishment, there were still no facilities for children in the settlement such as soccer fields and parks to play in. Children were forced to play on the road as there were no other developed spaces. There were, however, now schools, making life a lot easier for parents and children.

Economic impacts

Housing formalisation often reduced affordability and residents' abilities to pursue livelihood practices. The move to formal housing resulted in some economic advantages through having electricity to support small businesses; however, loss of income was commonplace. Various reasons account for this, including the shift in location, entailing a loss of an established market for sale of informal products. Shacks, including backyard shacks, are also significant sources of rental income (Lemanski, 2009). In settlements where shack construction is controlled,[15] or where sections of shacks have been eradicated, economic impacts are evident: 'The landlord of the shacks lost the money from the renters' (Jabulani, ♂ FG2, CC, 2011). Residents also reported a reduction in their ability to engage in informal trade in areas of formal housing. This appears to be tied to the seeming inappropriateness of informal trade in a new formal context sometimes underpinned by 'new rules' of formalisation.

Poor build quality of housing causes unexpected costs for maintenance and repairs. The state is fully aware of the complaints from residents regarding poor building quality and argues that it is actively working towards improving the delivery of quality housing by cracking down on rogue building contractors and being more actively

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15   Note there is national inconsistency in the responses of local councils to backyard shack construction. Some councils are highly controlling of such developments whereas other councils adopt a more relaxed approach.

involved in delivery.[16] Furthermore, it is working to rectify housing that is cracking, leaking and unstable (Interviews with municipal officers, 2011; eThekwini municipality, 2010; Cross, 2013, 246). There is also evidence that housing size is improving: municipal officers confirmed houses had grown in size from 10 m² (in Ambleton in Msunduzi) to the now 40 m² house, which crucially affords two bedrooms within the internal layout.[17] However, these larger houses were still not commonplace in these case study areas at the time of research (Interview with housing officer, eThekwini, 2010). Despite the state rhetoric about the importance of formal housing for 'family living and the future of children', representatives of the local state admitted that the type of formal housing that they are delivering is not designed with the specific needs of families in mind:

> The housing department does not consider the issue of families …. they consider the budget… Most of the things which the national government talks about are not happening at the lower level because of the funds… It is nice to do the speeches and the policy but the money to do this is not available. (Interview Msunduzi / Pietermaritzburg housing officer, 2011)

eThekwini Municipality claimed in 2010 and again in 2018 that it aims to provide 'housing that is better suited to the needs of inhabitants' (2010, 93; 2018, 314). The increase in house size may be indicative of these concerns but interviews with housing managers suggested there was little room for managing these 'needs' given the financial constraints they worked within, and which appeared to be a growing concern by 2018 (eThekwini, 2018). Furthermore, residents who have *already* received subsidised housing (figures at a national level stand at around four million houses delivered between 1994 and 2016: DHS, 2016, 20) are not eligible for these larger house or plot sizes which may facilitate the visions of 'decent' housing and 'homely neighbourhoods'. This constraint is also a function of changing policy contexts, whereby earlier housing was intended as 'starter housing' to which residents would contribute by extending and building on the basic unit through accessing finance to fund such extensions. This has worked for some, but has not always proved feasible due to affordability constraints, shaped by wider unemployment. Siphiwe explained: 'Everybody wishes to extend but the problem is the money to do that' (♂ focus group Ambleton, 2011). The materiality of extensions was also critical, with building materials central

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16   This ties in with moves in 1999 to introduce legal standards and norms in relation to the construction of properties under the national housing programme (Tissington, 2011, 19).

17   Although officials point to house size increase, these increases have not occurred under one uniform policy, but rather are a product of a range of housing measures, funding schemes and development initiatives. Similarly plot sizes are very variable, depending on local geo-technical conditions, the availability of land, etc. The 40 m² plot size is a minimum set out in the 2007 revisions to the national standards and norms guidance (Tissington, 2011, 20).

to shaping views of formal living: 'We are happy to get brick houses but we need more money to make it a proper house' (Phumlani, ♂ focus group Ambleton, 2011).

Conclusions

Residents' mixed experiences of their new formal housing illustrate that the (early) hyperbolic distinction between formal and informal housing (identified by the state in previous years and anticipated by some residents) was exaggerated, deserving instead a more muted framing. There *are* physical, economic, political and social differences between informal housing and formal housing. However, the rhetoric around formalisation vastly overstates and simplifies the contrasts between formal and informal housing; in particular, it overstates the socio-economic positives presumed to be gained with the receipt of formal housing. Persistent and new crises of affordability and livelihood vulnerabilities undermine residents' abilities to achieve 'homeliness' and evidence marginalised formalisation. These costs co-exist alongside perceivable benefits, particularly gains in identity relating to ownership and decency, suggesting that formalisation can be a form of urban improvement, but one which falls short of the 'high quality of life' goal proffered by the eThekwini vision in particular. For residents it does not (yet) meet the promise of dignity and security promised by the national state. This hyperbole overlooks the possible advantages of informal living, including sociability, community, cost-effectiveness and sometimes spatial advantages, as well as the possible disadvantages of formality identified above. The waning dichotomisation points to the politics of housing formalisation and the challenges of delivery at scale, but also the softening of urban policy towards ideas of informality and their role in housing urban residents.

As noted by urban scholars analysing the in/formal dichotomy in other global contexts, a critical risk is the obscuring of the relational qualities of in/formality (Boudreau and Davis, 2017). One material example of such interconnections is the way in which residents of Cato Crest built their shacks using the bricks from former 'formal' Indian housing located on the site but razed to the ground by the state in the 1950s. After digging deep into the soil the current residents came upon bricks, which proved to be excellent building materials in contrast to the wood, iron and plastic they had utilised, merging the formal with the informal. More importantly, this paper examines urban marginality alongside the process of formalisation revealing the significance of this relational analysis for comprehending the processes of in/formality. The 'formality' of formal housing ties intimately to experiences of poverty and marginalisation.

Finally, the overstated binary of in/formality alongside the construction of the 'deserving beneficiary' complicates the practice and theorisation of the politics of poor residents of formal housing, i.e. the politics of 'marginalised formalisation',

building on McFarlane's (2012) 'politics of formalisation'. In receiving a house, residents transition from informal dwellers (or insecurely housed residents) to beneficiaries and homeowners. The future claims they can make on the state for socio-economic support, in contexts of persistent informality and extensive waiting lists, are limited. These political implications of an enacted binary relate directly to questions of poverty and urban inequality, which persist and are key to experiences of formalisation, hence the framing in this paper of marginalised formalisation. Poverty cuts across the living environments of informal and much formal housing. Gaining a new house does not wipe away unemployment and insecurity; on the contrary, it can create unaffordability causing residents to relocate to informal housing while renting out their formal homes for income (see Rubin and Charlton, 2008).

The recognition that new housing does not automatically eradicate poverty is key. However, the primary contribution of this paper is that through a focus on policy over time, and the interplay between policy and the lived realities of everyday life, the in/formal dichotomisation can be understood as a *process* moving between hyperbole and waning, as well as between the realities of living in marginal conditions in informal housing to that of marginalised formalisation. This recognition does not obscure the important positive symbolic and material changes brought by formal housing. These shape residents' sense of worth commonly tied to notions and expectations of being a 'family'. More work needs to be done on the paradoxical outcomes of formalisation focusing specifically on the material and social realities of living in poor housing (including that beyond state provision, namely inner-city apartments, rental properties, hostels, and tenants in shared properties) and those residing in marginalised formalisation. These varied experiences all befit theorisation and analysis, not easily accommodated through the in/formal lens. This work is required in order to understand the interconnections and disconnections (where relevant) between normative agendas and everyday life, and to test the ways in which different housing forms and qualities work to shape the social lives of residents, advance or hinder desires for decency and support efforts to overcome poverty. This future work will also advance contributions to debating the processes of the formal/informal dichotomisation at the scale of the urban (and much else besides this) resting on residents' actual experiences (cf Anand and Rademacher, 2011), rather than academic objections.

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