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Racial Harassment in Social Housing in a Multi-ethnic City: The Case for Moving beyond Acting against Individual Perpetrators of Racial Harassment

Gina Netto and Humphrey Abazie

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Abstract

Progress in dealing with racial harassment and violence, including among social landlords, has been limited. Situating racial harassment within the current context of hate crime, this paper synthesises insights from studies into community cohesion, the sociology of racist victimisation and criminology research, and extensive qualitative research carried out in Glasgow. Issues examined include: the relationship between fear of racial harassment and locational choices; varying perceptions of the significance of racial harassment between housing organisations and ethnic minority individuals; the role of allocation policies; risk assessment and coping strategies; and the relationship between racial harassment and a wider culture of violence. It is argued that while there is scope for more effective implementation of existing policies, the deep-seated nature of the problem demands a shift in emphasis from an events-oriented approach which targets individual perpetrators towards longer-term community-based interventions.

Introduction

In the past two decades, several events have combined to bring racial violence and harassment to the fore in the UK, stemming from the murder of the Black teenager, Stephen Lawrence, and followed by the Islamophobic backlash from the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the

bombings in London. These have been mirrored by developments in many parts of Europe, including the rise of Far Right elements in France, Russia, the Netherlands and Italy.

Since the first official recognition of racial hatred and prejudice in the UK in 1981

Gina Netto is in the School of the Built Environment, Heriot-Watt University, EH14 4AS, UK. E-mail: G.Netto@hw.ac.uk.

Humphrey Abazie was formerly at the School of the Built Environment, Heriot-Watt University, EH14 4AS, UK. E-mail: humine4@yahoo.co.uk.

(Home Office, 1981), there has been extensive analysis of racial incidents. Initiatives to counter racial harassment have broadly been classified into three main approaches: taking action against perpetrators, supporting victims and preventative action. Strategic multi-agency fora involving the police, local authorities and community organisations have also been formed to tackle the phenomenon. Initiatives and guidelines to support social landlords in addressing racial harassment and for reporting and recording racial incidents have also been developed (CRE, 2006; Home Office, 2000). Racially aggravated offences in relation to harassment and criminal offence have also been introduced in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Similar initiatives have also been undertaken at a European wide level to counter violent manifestations of racism (see for example, EFR Agency, 2010).

Yet, signalling that progress in the UK since then has been limited, in 2010, the Equality and Human Rights Commission acknowledged that

Racist and religiously aggravated attacks are a persistent feature in British life; people from ethnic minority backgrounds are perceived to be twice as likely as people from White backgrounds to fear violent crime (EHRC, 2010, p. 190).

The persistent rates of racial harassment indicate the need for sustained attention to advance understanding both of the contributory factors and means of countering such harassment. Studies of racial harassment which reveal that most incidents occur near victims' homes (Chahal, 2007; Clark and Leven, 2000) and housing studies of ethnic minority households which reveal that fear of, and actual experience of, the phenomenon is common (Netto *et al.*, 2011; Phillips, 2006) combine to highlight the important role played by social landlords in

addressing racial harassment. Despite this, few academic studies have focused on the experiences of racist victimisation within and around places of residence, the challenges faced by housing organisations in responding to racial harassment and the potential for intervention. Such are the aims of this contribution in a field of rich scholarship on racist violence, which has mostly been undertaken in the field of criminology and which has tended to concentrate on the role of the police and other enforcement agencies. In contrast to these approaches, the paper considers the role of social landlords, in particular, on non-legal housing management approaches to tackling racial harassment.

The paper situates the phenomenon of racist victimisation in the UK within the context of community cohesion policy responses following urban unrest in northern England. This is also an area of sustained academic scholarship and policy interrogation (Wetherell *et al.*, 2007; Flint and Robinson, 2008) and has included some focused attention on the housing dimension (Robinson *et al.*, 2004; Harrison *et al.*, 2005; Flint, 2010). Broadly, the policy, which has been extensively criticised on the grounds of both validity and effectiveness, is based on the premise that the promotion of core British values—however identified—would facilitate the integration of ethnic minority individuals and reduce the potential for racial conflict. Urban theorists have traced the roots of the politics around the community cohesion agenda to the emergence of 'political communitarianism' which has been concerned with tackling a perceived decline in responsibility to community life (Robinson, 2008; Ratcliffe, 2011). Discussion begins by considering the problematic nature of such policies. Attention then turns to the current policy framing of racist violence under the broader banner of 'hate' crime and

examines specific definitional issues related to racial harassment, which might be overlooked in a more general study of crimes associated with prejudice or hatred. This is followed by a theoretical discussion of racist victimisation, stemming from a treatment of ethnicity as a dynamic process. The responses of housing organisations to this phenomenon are then reviewed, identifying areas of progress and persistent weaknesses, providing the context for our empirical study.

The second part of the paper discusses the socio-political context of the study, the methods used and key issues emerging from analysis of data generated from victims, housing organisations and support providers. Glasgow, Scotland's largest city, and the one with the highest concentration of ethnic minority individuals, provides fertile ground for investigating urban ethnic conflict at the neighbourhood level. We provide insights into victims' experience of the phenomenon and the lack of effectiveness of social landlords in countering such harassment. We argue that action against perpetrators needs to extend beyond a focus on individuals to more community-based approaches, which can build on ongoing work.

Racist Violence and the Limitations of Community Cohesion Approaches

At the UK level, policy responses to racist behaviour need to be understood in the context of wider responses to urban unrest in northern England, involving Pakistani and Bangladeshi men in 2001. The oft-cited Cante report (Community Cohesion Independent Review Team, 2004), which followed an official inquiry into the disturbances, concluded that many communities in these areas led 'parallel lives', referring to segregation in places of residence, education and employment. Multicultural approaches

were assumed to have failed and to have contributed to internal divisions and, ultimately, violence. Instead, community cohesion approaches were proposed, based on the assumption that promoting adherence to core values associated with a British identity would facilitate the integration of ethnic minority groups.

As several analysts (Amin, 2002; Robinson, 2008) have pointed out, the overemphasis of such approaches on cultural values failed to take into account several factors which contributed to 'forced segregation' including poverty, fear of racial attacks, the decline of certain industries and discriminatory housing allocation policies. More generally, racist violence beyond these northern English cities has been viewed as forms of displacement of resentment at economic decline, social decay and neighbourhood destabilisation onto Asian people (Ray and Smith, 2004). In a similar vein, the convenience of interpreting the urban unrest as an 'Asian problem', instead of addressing the more challenging task of dealing with the social deprivation experienced, has also been observed (Robinson, 2008).

In the field of criminology, racial harassment has been seen to reflect a local ethos of a perhaps influential tolerance of low-level racial hostility, which legitimises individual acts of racial harassment (Sibbitt, 1997; Webster, 2007). Other identified factors are the imbalance of power between perpetrator and victim, and the use of such incidents to create fear within the victim's broader community (Chakraboti and Garland, 2009).

Both strands of research suggest complex social processes at work in places deprived of employment and opportunities for moving out of these areas. In the context of this paper, locality-based understandings of degrees of 'belonging' are significant. Individuals who are viewed as not 'belonging' to those neighbourhoods, might be

perceived to be contributing towards disadvantaged social-economic conditions, and legitimate targets for abuse. In contrast, their counterparts in more affluent neighbourhoods, who might also be viewed as 'not belonging' by the majority of those residents, may not necessarily be subjected to racial harassment, reinforcing the importance of considering 'neighbourhood effects'. We now turn to the current policy context within which racial harassment is framed, highlight certain definitional issues which distinguish such harassment from other 'hate' crimes and, continuing our interest in neighbourhood effects, examine more closely the relationship between environmental conditions and racial harassment.

Racial Harassment, Hate Crime and Definitional Issues

Reflecting trends which parallel the policy direction from race relations to community cohesion and locate issues related to 'race' and ethnicity within the wider lens of equality and/or diversity, racist behaviour is now addressed within the context of hate crime. Hate crime has been defined by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) as

any incident which constitutes a criminal offence, perceived by the victim or any person, as being motivated by prejudice or hate (ACPO, 2005, p. 9).

The definition highlights hatred or prejudice of some aspect of the victim's identity as motivating criminal offences and emphasises the victim's, or any other person's, perception of the motivation of the crime.

In Scotland, recent legislative reforms—The Offences (Aggravation by Prejudice) (Scotland) Act 2009—provide for statutory aggravations to be attached to offences motivated by prejudice towards disabled or

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) people. This adds to similar provisions covering race and religion (respectively, the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003).

Despite the burgeoning literature on hate crime (Chakraboti and Garland, 2009; Chakraboti, 2010; Iganski, 2008) and anti-social behaviour (Flint *et al.*, 2007), few recent studies have focused on racial harassment. Yet this phenomenon is the most commonly committed type of hate crime, as well as the most recognised (Chakraboti and Garland, 2009).

A person harasses another on grounds of race, ethnic or national origin when the conduct is 'unwanted' and has the effect or purpose of violating the other person's dignity or "creating an intimidating ... or offensive *environment* for that person" (CRE, 2006, p. 25; emphasis added). While the recurring nature of many forms of racial harassment within certain geographical areas has been well established (Lemos, 2000; Virdee, 1997), they are not captured in the recent formulations of hate crime as already discussed. Yet, knowledge of these specific features is vital to advancing understanding of racial harassment and the design of effective interventions.

The definition also acknowledges that what is viewed as contributing towards an "intimidating ... or offensive environment" is necessarily a subjective judgement on the victim's part. The victim-centred approach to racial harassment is also reflected in ACPO's (2005) definition of a racial incident. The benefit of this approach is that it counters any tendency of the bodies to which incidents are reported, not to recognise a racial element.

However, a major shortcoming of this definition is its failure to recognise that the vast majority of racial incidents are perpetrated by individuals from the majority White population against ethnic minorities

(Chahal, 2007). This has led analysts to argue that this pattern of racist victimisation needs to be understood in the context of unequal power relations between majority and minority ethnic populations (Chahal, 1999; Hesse *et al.*, 1992). Indeed, Chahal (1999) has argued that blindness to this aspect of racist victimisation in official definitions contributes to ineffective policy and practice responses.

Ethnicity and Racist Victimisation

Given that racist attacks are primarily motivated by the victim's identity, it is worth examining key aspects of the conceptual tool of ethnicity in order to examine appropriate housing policy responses to racist victimisation. Ethnicity is a key aspect of identity—self, as well as that ascribed by others. Definitions of ethnicity generally point to notions of shared descent, culture, language or religion with other members of the group which serve to differentiate members of one group from those of other groups (Platt, 2007).

In the context of racist victimisation, it might be argued that the attribution of identity by others is key, including its use as 'a tool to victimise people on the basis of their difference' (Chakraboti and Garland, 2009). Racial incidents may be perpetuated through subjective perceptions of the ethnic identity of potential victims on the part of perpetrators which may or may not match the victims' own perceptions. Further, perceptions of ethnicity are fluid and contingent on factors both external to ethnic groups as well as those within the groups (Barth, 1969). This serves to reinforce the importance of considering how certain socio-political and geographical environments might contribute to accentuating aspects of ethnic identity in ways which provoke hostility and violence. Chakraboti (2010) has pointed out that these situational

factors are likely to be contingent on local, national and global influences, as illustrated by attacks on Muslims in the UK, following the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in New York and the London bombings. There is considerable scope here for assessing the role of key organisations in mediating such influences at various spatial levels, and at the strategic and practice levels. With this in mind and the tendency for many racial incidents to occur near victims' homes, the next section reviews the role of housing organisations in dealing with racial harassment.

Racial Harassment and Housing

In the UK, housing organisations have been urged to take action against the phenomenon for more than two decades (CRE, 1987). Problems included under-reporting of racial incidents and the difficulty of implementing appropriate measures for supporting victims. Two of the main options identified for victims were to either 'stay put' or transfer to another property. Measures against perpetrators included legal actions that could be taken by the police or social landlords, including eviction by the latter.

Nearly a decade later, the then Department of Environment (DoE, 1996) encouragingly found that certain key elements of good practice in dealing with perpetrators had spread among social landlords and that perpetrators were deterred by visits from housing officials, warning letters or injunctions. However, very few cases were pursued to prosecution and eviction due to the difficulties of collecting evidence, liaising with legal staff and persuading people to act as witnesses. Similar findings were reported in Lemos (2000) in Scotland, England and Wales which found that many housing authorities offered security improvements to victims of racial harassment in social housing, but few

victims were transferred and action against perpetrators was rare.

In Scotland, the Housing (Scotland) Act 1985 gave social landlords the powers to introduce changes to tenancy agreements and to repossess properties from perpetrators of racial harassment. This is supported by human rights legislation which recognises the rights of individuals to peaceful enjoyment of their homes. Further, in relation to taking action against perpetrators of racial harassment living in social housing, the EHRC makes it clear that such action does not constitute an infringement of the Human Rights Act, if the action taken is “lawful, necessary and *proportionate*” (EHRC, 2010, p. 190; emphasis added). However, in practice, social landlords with little understanding of the phenomenon may find it difficult to assess the necessity and proportionality of official responses, as we shall discuss. In the next section, attention turns to the geographical site for this study, the city of Glasgow, before discussing the methods used.

Multi-ethnic Glasgow and Racist Victimisation

In devolved Scotland, the Scottish government has responsibility for integration, social inclusion and key policy areas, including housing, health, social care and education. However, asylum and immigration are reserved matters, responsibility for which resides under the Westminster government in London. While community cohesion has not featured as a cause for concern in Scotland as in England (Kintrea and Suzuki, 2008), in 2001, Glasgow City Council formally recognised that sectarianism—perceived as religious conflict between Protestants and Catholics and historically originating from Ireland—was an issue. Research commissioned to examine the extent and nature of the problem

confirmed that sectarianism continued to have contemporary relevance in Scotland in general and in Glasgow in particular (NFO, 2003).

Mixed views about the inclusivity of Scottish multiculturalism prevail. Those positive about its inclusivity have argued that an ageing population which is likely to impact on the country’s economic growth (Lisenkova *et al.*, 2008) has meant that a more open approach towards migrants has been adopted here compared with England (Wren, 2007). Conversely, others have claimed that Scottish multiculturalism is characterised by complacency, a reluctance to recognise racism as a problem and a tendency to view England as the dominant Other (Williams and de Lima, 2006; Netto, 2006).

In examining levels of acceptance of the minority ethnic population in Scotland, it is instructive to consider the extent of racial harassment in its largest city. According to Strathclyde Police Authority, which covers the West of Scotland including the Glasgow City Council area, the rate of racist incidents between April to September in 2011/12 was 12.8 per cent per 10 000 people, an increase of 5.8 per cent over the same period in the previous year.¹ These rates are reflective of recording practices as well as actual numbers of racial incidents and include incidents outside the city as well as those within it. Yet, such figures are of concern because they are indicative of ongoing interethnic conflict in some of the country’s most deprived neighbourhoods, which might be at risk of being overlooked in the devolved policy arena.

Since 2000, Glasgow City Council (GCC) has been the only local authority in Scotland which has an agreement with the Home Office to provide housing for asylum-seekers, a legal category used in the UK to refer to individuals who are seeking refugee status. As a result, Glasgow has received significant numbers of asylum-seekers, the vast

majority of whom were dispersed primarily to areas of low demand and social deprivation. Some hostility was reported in these areas, with problems reported to be most severe in the Sighthill area, and attributed to a historical lack of investment in housing and community relations (Barclay *et al.*, 2003). This is consistent with more recent research in North Lanarkshire and six other local authority areas in England which found that a high proportion of refugees had experienced physical or verbal racial harassment (Evans and Murray, 2009). The Scottish Refugee Forum (2005) estimated that there were approximately 10 000 refugees and asylum-seekers living in Scotland, mainly in Glasgow. According to Glasgow City Council (GCC, 2011), in 2010, the city has a total ethnic minority population of 75 708, 12.8 per cent of the total population of 592 820. The total population of 'non-White' or visible minorities (including Pakistanis, Chinese, Indians and Africans) is 50 793 (8.6 per cent of the total population), while the total population of 'Other White' (including eastern, western and southern Europeans) is 24 915 (4.2 per cent of the total population). Eleven neighbourhoods have a visible ethnic minority population of more than 12 per cent, the most densely populated being Pollockshields East (52 per cent), Pollockshields West (37 per cent) and Govanhill (31 per cent), while 'Other White' are concentrated in Glasgow's West End, Maryhill Road Corridor, the city centre and Sighthill/Roystonhill.

In 2003, a dramatic change took place in the housing environment when Glasgow City Council (GCC) transferred its stock to the Glasgow Housing Association Ltd (GHA), a registered social landlord. Since then, GHA has completed a programme of 'second-stage transfers' which has seen nearly 19 000 homes transferred to 24 local community-based organisations (Inside Housing, 2011). GHA continues to be the

largest social housing provider with around 45 000 homes. GCC retains responsibility for identifying housing priorities for the city and providing a strategic framework for investment and management.

Methods

The paper draws on two empirical studies conducted in Glasgow. The first study (henceforth referred to as Study One) focused on routes to social housing taken by a group of ethnic minority individuals—that is, refugees; fear of racial harassment emerged as a major concern. The second study (henceforth referred to as Study Two) focused explicitly on racial harassment. Study One involved interviews with 38 refugees and focus group discussions with 14 individuals, while Study Two analysed data collected from 20 ethnic minority individuals. For the purposes of this paper, individuals from both groups will be collectively referred to as 'ethnic minorities'. Individuals participating in both studies included males and females originating from a wide range of African countries, as well as Algeria, Bangladesh, Cameroon, China, Kosovo, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Syria and Turkey. All aged above 20, their length of stay in the UK varied from 2 months to more than 10 years.

Both studies considered the responses of a sample of housing associations. In Study One, housing associations were selected in neighbourhoods densely populated by ethnic minorities. In Study Two, those organisations with the highest percentage of ethnic minority applicants were selected, on the basis that these were highly regarded among such applicants. The combined sample of housing organisations from both studies is thus diverse, including organisations of varying size and type of provision and desirability.

Study One analysed interviews with staff in five housing organisations (including senior managers and those with responsibility for estate co-ordination and community development), the manager of a social work team and voluntary-sector providers of (housing) support to asylum-seekers and refugees. It also drew on a focus group discussion with a network of support providers, including representatives from providers of temporary housing, social work, GHA and voluntary-sector support providers. Study Two analysed survey data and conducted interviews with senior managerial staff and 'neighbour relations' staff in six organisations. Both studies reviewed policy documents from the participating organisations.

The paper thus draws on original research with 72 ethnic minority individuals, 17 housing associations across the city and associated service providers. The wide range of different types of qualitative data analysed provided an opportunity to triangulate rich and nuanced data from multiple sources to advance inquiry in a field where interviews and focus groups remain the exception rather than the norm (Perry, 2010).

Data gathered from both studies was thematically analysed and interpreted on an independent basis. The analysis of each study was then synthesised, using elements of grounded theories and procedures to gain 'intimate familiarity' with respondents and their worlds (Blumer, 1969), in particular by categorising and sub-categorising common themes. A constructionist approach allowed research participants to cast their views in their own terms, which were 'pieced together' and foregrounded to generate meaning (Charmaz, 2000). Such an approach revealed the nature of some of the impacts on the individual as well as the tensions faced by housing associations in responding to the problem, alongside the challenge of managing the allocation of limited social housing. Given the in-depth

qualitative nature of the approach employed, the study was less concerned with providing broad generalisations on the responses of ethnic minority individuals and housing organisations to racial harassment than with identifying divergent views and perspectives. Despite this, it was possible to discern several trends. Five aspects of racial harassment are considered: the impact of fear of racial harassment on locational choices; varying perceptions of the significance of the phenomenon among housing organisations and ethnic minority individuals; the role of allocation policies; risk assessment and coping strategies; and the relationship of racial harassment to a wider culture of violence.

The Role of Racial Harassment in Determining Housing Choices

Many of the individuals interviewed in Study One stated that it was difficult to find accommodation in areas they perceived to be free from racial harassment, indicating the pervasiveness of the phenomenon in social housing estates, limited stock and high prioritisation of safety issues. Indeed, in many cases, safety from the phenomenon was identified as the single most important factor in housing-related decision-making processes

I am very, very concerned about safe area ... very important to me because you know Glasgow does not like some minority groups.

In other respects, housing preferences were remarkably similar to those of the majority population, including access to key services, transport links and proximity to places of work, consistent with research in northern England (Phillips *et al.*, 2008).

In contrast to this, when housing providers were asked to identify locations which would appeal to this client group, they

identified cultural or religious factors, such as proximity to places of worship and, for Muslims, proximity to shops which sold Halal food. The disjuncture between the locational preferences of ethnic minority individuals and those as perceived by housing practitioners parallels the preoccupation of the community cohesion agenda in emphasising religious and cultural values over the more pragmatic concerns of the former. Reinforcing the findings of other studies (Phillips *et al.*, 2008; Hesse *et al.*, 1992), ethnic minority individuals appeared to have a 'mental map' of safe social spaces to which they wished to move. Significantly, the long waiting time for social housing in certain areas suggests that these perceptions are shared with others. That safety from racial harassment does not appear to be recognised by many housing practitioners as a high priority for ethnic minority applicants may reflect a more general inability in the majority population to fully grasp the impacts of racism.

Racial Harassment: The Gulf between Ethnic Minority Experiences and Organisational Conceptualisations

Interview accounts of ethnic minority individuals indicate not only the pervasiveness of low levels of abuse, but their repetitive nature

We have problems with neighbours who say it is not our place to be here. They tell us to go back. We get that a lot.

A lot of people drink and come and kick at your door.

As Bowling (1993) points out, such acts of hostility are only partially captured by crime survey data which present racial harassment as static events. Such data demonstrate the predictability of ongoing victimisation and

'continuous insecurity' (Virdee, 1997) and the difficulty that ethnic minority individuals face in reporting regular low-level acts of harassment. One housing provider acknowledged that racial harassment was a regular occurrence, mostly in the form of verbal aggression, and that under-reporting was likely to be common, supporting other Glasgow-based evidence (Flint *et al.*, 2007)

Folks seem to expect this and will put up with this for a long time until it impacts on their kids.

Significantly, the data also indicate that, for some victims, the acts of harassment are not associated with a single perpetrator, but with multiple ones ('a lot of people' or 'neighbours'), concurring with those of the Scottish Crime Justice Survey (Clark and Leven, 2000) which found that around 60 per cent of individuals were victimised by three or more perpetrators.

Many housing associations had policies in place for addressing racial incidents. In line with good practice, many policies specified how victims and witnesses should be supported and the range of actions that could be taken against perpetrators. As an example, GHA outlined a staged, escalatory victim-centred process for dealing with complaints of racial harassment beginning with interviews with the victim and warnings to the perpetrator, and proceeding to further action and possible eviction. It was also encouraging to note that many organisations had taken measures to publicise their policies on racial harassment to tenants.

However, such events-oriented approaches to reacting to harassment appear to be heavily reliant on officer assessment of the severity of reported incidents. This is problematic, given the likelihood that the assessment involves individuals from the majority population judging the seriousness of acts inflicted on ethnic minorities. Further, policies based on the

premise that action can be taken against individual perpetrators fall short in tackling wider issues that might not be manifested in overt acts of harassment.

Disturbingly, despite the prevalence of the phenomenon and the availability of longstanding guidance, not all housing organisations had policies on racial harassment or had taken measures to implement these effectively. For instance, many which did have such a policy did not provide training for front-line staff on the duties of the organisation or other key agencies, suggesting a lack of commitment to policy implementation. Further, performance-monitoring systems for dealing with racial harassment were lacking. Other persistent trends identified included the small number of transfers among victims, low threats of repossession and actual eviction of perpetrators.

In sum, while some good practice in tackling more serious acts of harassment was evident, wide gaps between policy and practice exist. Further, some aspects of policies appear inherently flawed in tackling daily low levels of abuse. Yet, in sharp contrast to ethnic minority accounts, many housing associations believed that they were effectively responding to this phenomenon, citing low rates of reported incidents and lack of repeated reporting. This is despite evidence that under-reporting is due to lack of confidence on the part of ethnic minorities in organisational responses (Flint *et al.*, 2007).

The Role of Housing Allocation Policies

While some housing providers acknowledge concerns of racial harassment, their ability to place them in perceived safe areas appeared to be limited, given the limited supply of social housing. Here, it is worth noting more general concerns that migrants were obtaining preferential treatment in accessing social housing, which have been

seized upon by Far Right elements. This has meant that the allocation of existing social housing stock has been placed under increasing scrutiny (Ratcliffe, 2009), despite the lack of evidence for this (Rutter and Latorre, 2009).

At least one provider raised a dilemma that arose out of local knowledge that racial harassment was more likely to occur in certain areas

Do we not make an offer on that basis? [The housing estate] is an area where there is a low BME concentration..., ... but what if that is what is available?

This extract suggests that racial harassment may be more likely to occur in areas which are not significantly populated by ethnic minority individuals and the fear on the part of housing providers of creating 'no go' areas, where such individuals are not tolerated. This was a problem identified more than two decades ago (CRE, 1987), to which no easy solutions were proposed. Recommended action for removing the barriers to residing in such areas involves close co-ordination between housing officers and the police, effective communication to perpetrators and victim support. Yet, the persistence of this dilemma indicates lack of awareness of available guidance, the intractable nature of the problem or both.

On the part of ethnic minorities, the difficulty of finding appropriate accommodation in safe areas meant that trade-offs had to be made between willingness to accept available accommodation and waiting time

It was really, really difficult to get a place of your choice. You can get one in X or Y (wards in Glasgow) quickly, but if it's a good area, there is a very long queue.

Housing organisations echoed the finding that the shortage of properties in areas

that victims preferred was a major constraint to allocating housing to ethnic minority individuals in the first place, as well as facilitating transfers to other areas, once individuals had been subjected to harassment. There was also a view that transferring victims would indicate to the perpetrator that they had succeeded in displacing individuals, possibly reinforcing racist behaviour. While such views might be valid, the damage caused to victim/s in 'staying put' needs to be weighed carefully against the risk of encouraging perpetrators. The difficulties associated with resolving such situations highlight the value of preventative approaches in the form of allocation policies, and drawing on community-based resources, as will be considered later.

Choice-based lettings (CBL) approaches in which social landlords advertise homes for let and applicants take the initiative in bidding for vacancies, offer greater transparency than discretionary procedures. Such approaches have the potential for ethnic minority individuals to move into areas where they might be less vulnerable to racial harassment than might have been possible through traditional allocation policies. There is some evidence that such schemes have achieved more positive outcomes for minority ethnic communities than previously (Pawson *et al.*, 2006). However, they are not likely to be equally accessible to all sections of the population, including those who lack access to computing facilities, have literacy issues or are not fluent enough in English to make bids within the time-frame allowed (Netto and Beider, 2012). The extent to which the traditional practice of allocating accommodation to designated refugees, along with other homeless individuals, continues to operate through CBL schemes is also not clear.

That residence in certain areas increases vulnerability to racial harassment presents a

real challenge to housing providers. Our study reveals that, while it might be necessary to take action against individual or household perpetrators of serious racial incidents, there is an urgent need for developing more area-based approaches to low-level abuse. Such approaches would need to be grounded in the understanding that, since complex and dynamic social processes give rise to such hostility, equally complex social processes, involving community development activities, are required to counter them.

Risk Assessment and Coping Strategies

In the face of a limited shortage of housing in areas preferred by ethnic minorities, issues of local management, as well as the extent to which people are supported once they are housed, were raised. One manager revealed some of the factors that influenced allocation processes

It's really just a question of what support is there ... Do they know other people in their community? ... it's a question of risk assessment. We have to look at ... the best solution for that particular family with what resources you have.

Such approaches might be viewed as a tacit acknowledgement of the need for informal support mechanisms to reduce the distress experienced in encountering racial harassment (McDevitt *et al.*, 2002). While they might run the risk of being viewed as an abdication of organisational responsibility, these approaches are validated by the preference of many ethnic minority individuals who associate multi-ethnic areas with safer and more supportive living environments

It is good to know which areas are multicultural, rather than being in areas where there is only one culture.

Paralleling the experience of dispersed minority ethnic communities in rural areas where shared vulnerability to racial harassment provides 'commonality, kinship and shared experience', this strategy might be viewed as a means of creating 'communities of shared risk' (Chakraboti and Garland, 2003) where interethnic conflict might be likely to erupt.

Racial Harassment and a Wider Culture of Violence

In many cases, it was apparent that vulnerability to racial harassment was associated with other elements of criminality, such as drug-dealing and lack of respect for property signalling a wider culture of violence

There is a drug dealer in the block ... people coming in all the time ... very dangerous.

Security is the main issue ... there is a lot of vandalism ... I want to feel safe.

Ethnic minorities' association of racial harassment with fear of crime is consistent with research which has revealed that perpetrators did not 'specialise' in violent racism, but were also responsible for other acts of criminality and violence (Webster, 2007). Indeed, in this hostile environment, it was sometimes the case that individuals could not discern whether abuse to which they had been subjected was racially motivated or not

When I was walking, they drop eggs from above, I don't know if it's racial harassment or not.

While many of the accounts related to verbal abuse, harassment also took the form of physical abuse and other threatening behaviour. The following account illustrates the fear of many individuals that these acts might escalate into (more severe) forms of violence, and even murder

They killed a person in front. I was really afraid because I had two boys. I didn't want them out in the dark ... Once this happened, I wanted to go somewhere safe.

It also indicates how individuals adapt through restricting movement and remaining indoors, thus illustrating the constraints placed on the use of space (Hesse *et al.*, 1992). In a small number of cases, fear of racial harassment had forced individuals to seek accommodation outwith the social rented sector, despite affordability constraints. This is consistent with other research which has revealed cross-tenure moves and the presence of 'reluctant' owner-occupiers in poor quality accommodation, due to the lack of suitable low-risk alternatives (Netto *et al.*, 2001). Even more significantly, interview accounts also indicated that, in a few cases, experience of harassment had contributed to individuals' decision to move from one city to another, and may influence future moves, highlighting the influence of racial hostility on mobility at wider spatial levels than has previously been documented.

Discussion

Combining insights from studies on community cohesion, the sociology of racist victimisation and the field of criminology, we have argued that, while all forms of hate crime take place in the context of unequal power balances and the subordination of minority groups, the specific features associated with racist victimisation call for targeted responses. In particular, pervasive and persistent low levels of abuse combine with the potential for certain events to trigger interethnic conflict, requiring greater understanding of the way in which ethnicity interacts with deprivation in local urban contexts. Such knowledge is needed to inform the development of effective

housing policy and practice interventions, alongside those of other key agencies. The importance of focused attention in addressing this phenomenon is evidenced by the devastating impacts of sustained low-level abuse on wellbeing, use of public space and ability to integrate within wider society. While these findings have emerged from detailed qualitative work within the city of Glasgow, they are likely to be relevant to many other multi-ethnic cities in western Europe, where an increasingly diversified population has been viewed as placing pressure on limited resources, particularly in the highly contested area of access to social housing (Pettigrew, 1998).

By interweaving the perspectives of housing providers against those of ethnic minority individuals, the study has highlighted the disjuncture between the high priority accorded to safety from racial harassment among ethnic minority individuals and the low levels of awareness among social landlords of their fear. This gulf in understanding may at least partially account for the latter's lack of effectiveness and help to explain why more decisive action is not the norm. The study has also demonstrated the difficulties faced by ethnic minority individuals in reporting persistent low levels of abuse from multiple perpetrators, and those faced by social landlords in addressing this problem. Further, the situation is exacerbated by social landlords' flawed assumption that low rates of reported harassment are an indicator of the effectiveness of their policies. Substantial qualitative evidence has indicated that certain areas are perceived to be much less safe than others among ethnic minority individuals, providing grounds for raising awareness of what we term the 'geography of racial hostility' not only in the city which has been the main site of this study but in other western European multi-ethnic cities.

Closely related to such a geography, the study has revealed the complexity of

informal decision-making and risk assessment processes in allocating housing to ethnic minority individuals. In the UK and in many other western European countries, this takes place within the context of limited social housing; the difficulties faced by social landlords in allocating safe accommodation to ethnic minority individuals is indeed formidable. Social landlords also fear that by not allocating them housing in certain areas they may perpetuate 'no go' areas where ethnic minorities are not tolerated. This illustrates some awareness of the significant role that they can play in either sustaining communities where diversity is not tolerated or unwittingly increasing vulnerability to racist victimisation. It also reveals the significant role they can play in either perpetuating or challenging views of who is seen to belong and not belong. How this role is played out in this country and in other parts of western Europe is inextricably linked to the wider organisational ethos relating to multiculturalism and the management of diversity, which in turn are likely to be linked to wider policy debates and discourses around multiculturalism.

Our findings strongly suggest that some of the more traditional means of responding to racial harassment, as embodied in certain policies, do little to alleviate the distress inflicted on victims. In particular, the 'events-based' prioritisation of responses by some housing organisations according to the seriousness of acts of hostility suffers from three major shortcomings. First, such approaches fail to acknowledge the reality of living with racial harassment on a daily basis, with its consequent negative impacts and the limitations it poses. Secondly, they do not take into account the potential for low levels of abuse to escalate into violence and more serious criminal incidents, which might be triggered by local, national or global events. Such incidents may amplify the extent to which ethnic minority

individuals are viewed as legitimate targets for local hostility and worse. Thirdly, since such approaches tend to be solely focused on individual perpetrators or households, they fail to respond to actions carried out by groups of people.

Instead, we argue that action against perpetrators needs to be framed beyond the conceptualisation of the individual tenant as the central figure for tackling racial harassment towards more community-based approaches which build on on-going work by key organisations and individuals in the area (Scottish Refugee Council, 2009). This would involve greater prioritisation of the issue by social landlords, close co-operation with other organisations at the neighbourhood level and adequate resourcing. Such approaches would be consistent with a long history of linking the provision of social housing to wider community development and neighbourhood renewal processes (Flint, 2006). It is also consistent with the blurring of boundaries between social housing, crime control and policing, observed in recent studies, and the increasing emphasis placed on local communities as determinants of moral values and agents of social control (Flint, 2006). Framing action against racial harassment through these approaches emphasises the obligation of social tenants not only to desist from committing individual acts of racial hostility themselves, but to endeavour to engender tolerance of 'difference' among others. Such obligations also extend to individuals living in other tenures, including those in affluent neighbourhoods. However, there is evidence which suggests that where ethnic minorities have been accommodated in such neighbourhoods, they are less likely to be racially harassed (Netto and Fraser, 2010). In contrast, in deprived neighbourhoods, community-based approaches which seek to overcome

the potential for interethnic conflict necessarily involve the embedding of such action within wider anti-poverty, crime reduction, community safety strategies, and the provision of adequate affordable housing for all to reduce tension arising out of perceived competition for scarce resources. These approaches are necessarily long-term and resource-intensive, and should not be viewed as a substitute for swift, effective action against individual perpetrators.

While the precise dynamics and patterns of racial harassment in any multi-ethnic city are an empirical question, our study highlights the important role that social housing providers can play, together with other key agencies responsible for addressing racial harassment, in creating or sustaining communities where ethnic diversity is either supported, tolerated or (violently) rejected. It also reinforces the findings of other research which has indicated that 'hot spots' for racial hostility are associated with areas of deprivation, social problems associated with drug and alcohol abuse, and a wider culture of violence, and hence require complex community-based interventions. Future research can usefully explore the correlation between racist victimisation, concentrations of deprivation and social housing to substantiate the extent to which the geography of racial hostility overlaps with the geography of poverty and tenure, and other forms of hate crime.

Note

1. See: http://www.strathclyde.police.uk/assets/pdf/diversity_documents/Diversity_Report_April_Sept_2011.pdf (last accessed July 2012).

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