Article:
Chatterjee, P., Sisson, A., Condie, J. et al. (2021) Documentary and resistance: There goes our neighbourhood, #WeLiveHere2017 and the Waterloo estate redevelopment. International Journal of Housing Policy, 22 (3). pp. 329-350. ISSN: 1949-1247

https://doi.org/10.1080/19491247.2020.1851636

Documentary and resistance: *There Goes Our Neighbourhood*, #WeLiveHere2017 and the Waterloo estate redevelopment

Pratichi Chatterjee, Alistair Sisson, Jenna Condie, Laura Wynne, Clare Lewis and Catherine Skipper

International Journal of Housing Policy:
https://doi.org/10.1080/19491247.2020.1851636

Abstract

This paper is about a documentary that formed one component of a project to draw attention to and contest the redevelopment of Sydney's Waterloo public housing estate. *There Goes Our Neighbourhood* is a strategic impact documentary that chronicles residents' efforts to resist or reshape the redevelopment project. It was part of, and followed, the #WeLiveHere2017 campaign – a campaign which also involved the collective production of a protest artwork via the illumination of two towers with LED lights, and digital storytelling via social media. Following reflections from both the filmmaker and a participant in the campaign, we interrogate the impacts of *There Goes Our Neighbourhood*, including how it challenges the stigmatisation of public housing tenants and estates, and critically discuss the producers' approach to engaging different audiences and navigating competing interests. We conclude by suggesting that while *There Goes Our Neighbourhood* and #WeLiveHere2017 may not have changed the course of the redevelopment, they have had – and may yet have – positive impacts in other ways.

Keywords

Public housing, activism, documentary, social media, digital storytelling

Introduction

The scene is of a crowded meeting in a community centre. Scores of anxious and angry residents have gathered to hear more information about the government's plans. Weeks earlier, a fortnight before Christmas 2015, they received a letter to inform them that their neighbourhood would be

redeveloped, that they would be relocated from their homes and return when their homes had been replaced. But they weren't told when that would occur, how long they would be away, or whether they could have a say. To the politicians and public servants who gathered to explain and assuage, one resident asks, 'What the hell is going on?!'

These are the opening segments of the documentary *There Goes Our Neighbourhood* (*TGON*), capturing the anger, frustration and disbelief of tenants of the Waterloo public housing estate following the announcement of the estate's redevelopment. Waterloo is in inner-south Sydney, a few kilometres south of the city's central business district. The estate is situated amidst largely gentrified neighbourhoods in every direction. It is the densest concentration of public housing in the city, comprised of over 2000 dwellings over 18 hectares, configured in two 29-storey towers, four 16-storey towers and dozens of smaller apartment buildings. It is home to a culturally diverse community and located in an area of enormous cultural and political significance to Aboriginal people; the estate neighbours Redfern, which has been described as the crucible of the movement for Aboriginal self-determination in the 1960s and 1970s and once home to tens of thousands of Aboriginal residents (Redfern Oral History Project, n.d.; Foley, 2001; Perheentupa, 2020). As such, it has for decades been subject to vicious stigmatisation, and more recently to a range of redevelopment projects and proposals. The Waterloo estate redevelopment is the latest in a long line of similar interventions locally and is part of a global trend of pathologising and eradicating or diluting low-income housing to make way for private residential development, following the mixed tenure redevelopment model that has spread far and wide throughout the Global North (Arthurson, 2012; Darcy, 2013; Lees et al., 2012)

Set against this context, *TGON* traces a story of resident resistance. A handful of tenants, including members of the Waterloo Public Housing Action Group (WPHAG), as well as local artists and activists, embark on a collaborative art and documentary project that proclaims their place in the city and speaks back to a government and society that wants them removed. They call their project #WeLiveHere2017. The centrepiece of their work is a community-led light sculpture, created by installing multi-coloured LED lights in the windows of the two towers, illuminating them on the city's skyline and symbolising residents' attachment and belonging (see Figure 1). The mobilisation of this sculpture, and the wider campaign against the redevelopment, is captured in the documentary and ongoing social media campaign. This complex assemblage of relationships, place, buildings, homes, lights, photography, documentary, social media and events is both a transmedia storytelling campaign (Nash & Corner's, 2016) and a critical spatial practice (Colangelo, 2019); documentary film and light sculpture are simultaneously forms of resistance and tools for mobilising resistance.

Figure 1. Waterloo's Matavai & Turanga towers, illuminated for #WeLiveHere2017. Credit: Nic Walker.

In this paper we explore the trials and tribulations of making art that is both part of and about a housing struggle, and reflect on the legacy and impact of *TGON* and the #WeLiveHere2017 project. We, the paper's authors, were all involved to varying degrees in the *TGON*, #WeLiveHere2017 and the broader resistance to the redevelopment. The paper has provided an opportunity to explore the potential and challenges of socially engaged and creative activism that retells and reframes a story 'in a way that engages audiences and negotiates the increasingly neoliberal funding structures of independent filmmaking' (Condie & Lewis, 2017, p. 20). We explore issues of power, representation, audience, and the vexed question of 'impact'. We draw attention to the challenges of such digital-physical actions that attempt to shift wider national and international perceptions of public housing that are rooted in deeply entrenched stigma, whilst also appealing to, mobilising, and presenting an authentic picture of the complexities of local struggles and lives.

Our paper begins with a brief background on the Waterloo estate and the redevelopment project before presenting a pair of reflections from Clare Lewis, the director of *TGON* and the organiser of the wider #WeLiveHere2017 initiative, and Catherine Skipper, a tenant who was actively in the project. Both Catherine and Clare provide accounts of how #WeLiveHere2017 came together and its significance for the community in Waterloo. Both see *TGON* and the light sculpture as practices of resistance

which offered platforms for tenant voices and narratives that challenged the stigmatisation and erasure of the estate and their community. Both recount the difficulties of creating art and media that garners local support and action and that appeals to a mass television audience whilst maintaining the nuance and complexity of the multitude of stories that emerge from a place like Waterloo. The subsequent section considers the role of *TGON* in confronting the stigmatisation of tenants and territorial stigmatisation of the estate. We then critically discuss the project's ability to galvanise local struggles and appeal to a larger audience or public beyond the local community. We also reflect on the challenge, perhaps inherent to such projects, of managing multiple competing interests and demands, which do not always align comfortably with the marginalised perspectives and grounded realities that we might wish to portray. *TGON*'s producers and participants had to navigate the agendas of state authorities and the demands of a national broadcaster who both sought to control the narrative about redevelopment and tenant resistance. We end the paper by contemplating the legacy of *TGON* and #WeLiveHere2017, noting that while the redevelopment has not been halted, there are multiple other metrics of impact and success. TGON and #WeLiveHere2017 briefly ruptured in the stigmatisation of tenants and the estate, and will live on as reminders and resources for future struggles against dispossession. The documentary performs an important function as an archive of a lived space and a struggle against gentrification

Background

TGON tells a story that is perhaps very familiar to audiences engaged with housing policy, research, and activism in Australia, in the Global North, and in many places beyond. A public housing estate, labelled a 'slum' or 'ghetto' over the past twenty years or more, and declared 'unfit for purpose' due to its outmoded design and decades of state neglect, is set to be demolished and redeveloped in the name of social and economic improvement. The Waterloo estate was marked for redevelopment in December 2015, set for demolition and replacement with a mixed neighbourhood of 7,000 to 8,000 dwellings, 30% of them social housing and 70% for the market (see Wynne & Rogers, 2020).

This has been the model of choice for several previous estate renewal projects in Sydney and around Australia, where public housing accounts for a very small proportion of the total housing stock and has been chronically under-resourced and thus 'residualised' over the last forty years (see Atkinson & Jacobs, 2008; Troy, 2012). However, in two respects Waterloo is somewhat unique. Firstly, it is the first inner city estate in Sydney for which redevelopment has been sought. Notwithstanding the infamous privatisation of public housing in Millers Point, Dawes Point and the Rocks (Darcy &

Rogers, 2016; Morris, 2016), previous projects targeted lower-density suburban estates, many in the much-maligned Radburn style (Darcy, 2013; Eastgate, 2016). The redevelopment of the Waterloo estate is therefore more resonant with projects in 'global cities' like London and Toronto (e.g. August, 2016; Lees, 2014), where gentrification and city-wide housing booms have dramatically revalorised inner-city estates into prime real estate, and they have in turn been demolished and capitalised upon.

Planning for the redevelopment of the Waterloo estate began in the mid-2000s, although it was halted between 2011 and 2015, with new plans announced in December 2015. This brings us to the second unique, and undeniably related, aspect of the Waterloo estate renewal: its connection to the neighbourhood of Redfern and thus to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Sydney (see Foley, 2001; Perheentupa, 2020; Shaw, 2011). Intensely stigmatised along lines of both race and class, Redfern and Redfern-Waterloo (the compound through which the two are often imagined and described) were the subject of multiple rounds of redevelopment planning during the 2000s, in response to 'riots' protesting the death of Aboriginal teenager TJ Hickey during a police pursuit in 2004 (see Birch, 2004; Budarick, 2011). Several sites were redeveloped, including the cooperatively-owned Aboriginal Housing site known as the Block (see Anderson, 1993; Greenland, 2014). The Redfern and Waterloo public housing estates were the next redevelopment target, but the plans were abandoned amidst government restructuring and inter-agency disagreement. Nevertheless, they remained in the minds of politicians and bureaucrats, and at the height of the Sydney housing boom in 2015, the New South Wales (NSW) Government decided once again that it must redevelop the Waterloo estate. Public housing tenants in Waterloo were predictably angered, frightened and disturbed by the revival of such plans, particularly given that many of the estate's towers had previously been deemed "not at the end of their economic life and … likely to be retained for some time" (RWA, 2011, p. 54). These sentiments were shared by many researchers, activists and neighbours, among them the producer of *TGON*, Clare Lewis.

We turn the remainder of this section over to Clare and tenant activist Catherine Skipper, who reflect on the documentary and #WeLiveHere2017. At the request of the paper's other authors, they discuss their initial hopes and intentions, the challenges and frustrations they faced, and their sense of what the project achieved. As Clare writes, the documentary and the #WeLiveHere2017 project were examples of "strategic communication" (Nash & Corner's, 2016) – a transmedia campaign for public housing that is part strategic impact documentary and part activism through art and social media. It is perhaps too soon to assess its impact, but the experiences recounted below are instructive nonetheless.

Making Waterloo unignorable: reflections from the filmmaker

I had always walked through the Waterloo estate and admired one solitary window that was illuminated green. It glowed emerald from the large, rounded concrete windowsill on the 28th floor. Neighbours and I talked about that window at a local barbecue: 'Imagine these buildings with coloured lights in each home … imagine how arresting it would be … how unignorable … how logistically impossible'.

After the 2015 announcement to erase and reimagine 40-acres of public housing for high-density, by majority private developments, the seed of an idea—to make Waterloo unignorable—began to grow. I found the scale of the planned changes and the implications for my neighbourhood to be deeply alarming. There was an urgency to the project, a concrete reason to collaborate with the tenants of Waterloo. I began documenting on camera some stories from the tenants of Waterloo estate, and attending meetings with the action group and other 'consultancies'.

I do not live in public housing myself, but for a decade had lived in Waterloo. I felt connected to the community, but had not collaborated with them before. The planned redevelopment galvanised people from both private and public housing. We had common ground: we were against the erasure of our sense of place, and we were stronger together.

Was the use of the highrises as a platform for protest something that they could picture too? Was this a way that they wanted to use their building? Could working together to share their stories and create a large-scale community artwork help broadcast their predicament more broadly? Perhaps even change the conversation about the place where they live, save it even?

I spoke with many residents. We began to develop a vision for a project which would see the estate's two 29-storey towers illuminated in a symbol of both protest and persistence: a simple statement of presence that soon came to be the project's name: '#WeLiveHere2017'. As we embarked on the project, we found many people who shared the vision for #WeLiveHere2017—many that resisted the intrusion. We filmed the process to help share the story of Waterloo and its community, and the resulting documentary was aired on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), Australia's national public broadcaster.

Storytelling is of course a highly subjective and selective medium. As producers, we inevitably steered the story, shaping its direction and form. There are events and people that were left out. There are characters that emerge as important voices. There are dominant alpha types and there are reluctant exhibitionists. It is impossible to tell the whole story. We can only hope that we represented some of the experiences of the estate, and the fascinating complexity of a protest artwork of this scale. My hope is that we show that this was an artwork and a film that pulled people together, that

it generated immense local pride, and got people from all corners of the city talking about what was happening at Waterloo.

In contrast to the official 'community consultation' process, which proceeded like death by a thousand cuts, the film and the art project gave a tangible and purposeful avenue for discontent about the direction of Waterloo's future. For many of the tenants in Waterloo, seeing the lights was their only engagement in the changes being wrought around them. The impact of the image of illuminated coloured lights as a beacon to the community was, in fact, so powerful, that the machine of government couldn't help but reappropriate it for their own—more sinister—purposes. A graphic treatment of the tower with coloured windows became the logo of NSW Government's 'Let's Talk Waterloo' initiative, emblazoned onto community information sheets and name badges of the public servants tasked with making residents feel included in the inevitable subsumption of their homes into a capitalist future.

This was my first film, and creating an hour-long story for a national broadcaster with a cast of five hundred—while juggling the creation of a community artwork within the homes of hundreds of tenants across two 29-storey towers—was challenging, to say the least. It took dogged commitment from everyone who was involved. It was only because of the shared vision of the hardworking tenants and the people that participated that the project was made possible. Whether that work pays off in a broader sense, in terms of achieving positive outcomes for the existing Waterloo community, remains to be seen. For a number of reasons, the fate of the community and their homes remains somewhat uncertain. The NSW Government released a masterplan for the estate in 2019 which involves demolishing the two 29-storey towers featured in our documentary (as well as all other existing buildings on the estate), however the local government has indicated that they wish to see the two towers saved—and that a redevelopment plan with significant lower residential densities be implemented. Regardless of the future fate of Waterloo estate, and of public housing in general, *There Goes Our Neighbourhood* will remain, providing a document of this moment in time, providing at least one lens on the burden borne by this community as a result of government ambitions for the remaking of the city.

Clare Lewis, 2019

Action, art and engagement: reflections from a tenant activist

As a resident of Matavai Tower—one of the two 29-storey towers which became the focus of *There Goes Our Neighbourhood*—I became involved in resisting the so-called 'Redevelopment of Waterloo' at the outset as I felt it was a shoddy attempt at removing the poor from the city and removing the

traces of a former working class area from what was intended to become a new haven for yuppies. Equally important was my shock at the philistinism of a government that could consider the demolition of the two towers, Matavai and Turanga, which are outstanding examples of Sydney Brutalist architecture. Finally, I felt great anger at the supreme indifference of the government to the proposed destruction of the loved homes of over 2,000 housing tenants.

My first action was to graffiti the hoarding of a nearby development site and the paths around the towers with simplified images of the two towers and the slogan 'Save the twin towers'. Initially, I believed this effort didn't change public opinion at all but, looking back, I think this was a mistaken view. The community has remembered those images and the stencil has been purchased by a gallery owner and, secondly, it gave me some authority (illusory, because I was not the fearless fighter against oppression but really dreadfully nervous while spraying the stencils!) as a speaker on behalf of my community. I was interviewed at the time by the *Guardian*, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, two local newspapers, and ABC Radio National, and asked to write for *The Fifth Estate*.

I was a diligent attendee of the various components of the NSW Government's consultation process, which I viewed at the time—and even more so now—as a very expensive and successful strategy to diffuse potential resistance. It was inordinately long, repetitive and deceptive. If we lived in a true democracy, we might have been asked if we wanted the estate to be redeveloped. Right from the outset, however, the notion that residents were being 'consulted' was false, as it imposed the fact of the redevelopment as a given. Several other important issues which the tenants wished to negotiate on—including the ratio of social to private properties, the height of the buildings and decisions relating to where to situate social tenants within the complex—were from the outset 'non-negotiable', in the Government's own language. Tenant participation in these consultation events was not exactly enthusiastic. Yet, after many 'consultative' meetings and the inevitable butcher's paper[1] and the devising of lists and preferences, a 'visioning paper' was released which did not match up to the residents' visions I had seen expressed on the butcher's paper. The visioning paper was prepared by a private communications consultant engaged by the NSW Government. Are we to assume that the authors are totally objective and not following Government guidelines and directives?

Amid all the red-tape and formalities and endless pieces of paper reprising previous meetings, the #WeLiveHere2017 project was a welcome change: an oasis in a desert of inaction, subterfuge and lies. It was all action, art and engagement, and I was delighted to be part of it. I was particularly delighted by Clare's account of her inspiration for the light project: seeing a green light glowing in one of the tower windows as she walked down George Street in

the evening. This detail is important: the idea for #WeLiveHere2017 grew out of the tenants and the towers, rather than being imposed upon it—in contrast to the redevelopment project itself, which was an external imperative being imposed upon our community.

The intention of the #WeLiveHere2017 project was to light up two of the towers marked for demolition, making the wider community aware that they were not just buildings but housed a large number of people to whom they offered security, identity and belonging. A landmark in the daytime owing to their height, the towers became a landmark at night: glowing in the darkness, aesthetically and symbolically appealing. The colour of the lights installed in consenting tenants' apartments could be changed by the use of a simple remote, and tenants were encouraged to choose a colour reflecting their emotional response to the prospective demolition. In this way, the lights became a platform for protest and resistance, and gave the tenants a personal avenue for expressing their feelings.

Persuading tenants to participate was a mixed experience. Some tenants indicated initially that they would be happy to see the whole estate demolished, but over time I think this attitude has changed. Many were cynical about anything connected with the redevelopment as they had participated in consultation relating to earlier government initiatives that had fizzled out, and others still were demoralised as they often expressed that they were powerless to influence government decisions. However, as more and more lights appeared in the windows, more residents were inspired to get involved. Throughout the installation of the artwork and the making of the documentary, we made repeat visits to many tenants, and as the faces became familiar the general morale improved and many even began to show some pride in their building and in the estate. This pride grew further thanks to attention received during the light project and as a result of the documentary, which generated public interest in Waterloo and in the architectural value of the two towers.

The documentary extended the life of the artwork and gave insight into the process of installing the lights. It too was originally to be called 'We Live Here' but the title was changed following discussions with the ABC, both to distinguish it from the international 'We Live Here' movement and because it was thought to be catchier and therefore more likely to attract audience attention. The change is not inconsequential but is quite an important shift in perspective: from affirmation—'we live here'—to negation— 'there goes our neighbourhood'. Naturally, the documentary was heavily edited to manage the massive amount of footage, and shaped in certain ways to turn the residents' reactions into entertaining television. This is the challenge with producing documentary television: there is a need to achieve a good audience share, and to achieve that a programme must be watchable and sustain audience interest.

The documentary's audience is given an insight into the vastly different lifestyles and attitudes of the tower dwellers. The personal stories told were often very moving, and the circumstances of lives harrowing, but many were optimistic, enjoyed living in the tower community, and welcomed the team into their often very idiosyncratic homes. Key in this personalisation of the story was the use of Bex and Mary—two women who were key proponents of the lighting project—as narrative anchors. Both have lived in public housing most of their lives, young mothers struggling to make decent lives for their children and both are honest about themselves and compassionate towards others. The impression the two women make when talking together is splendid corrective to the grubby image of housing tenants conveyed by the *Daily Telegraph* and the SBS documentary *Housos*[2].

A local newsagent commented adversely on *There Goes Our Neighbourhood*. She saw the documentary as revealing the towers' inhabitants as crazy, incapable of living alone and a poor advertisement for social welfare. However, hers was the only adverse opinion I heard. The residents of my towers were absolutely delighted to see people they knew given media exposure, and now still remind participants of their appearance on television. Outside Waterloo, the documentary gave people cause to discuss the towers. Whether for or against, the towers became a worthy topic of conversation.

There Goes Our Neighbourhood extended the efforts of the #WeLiveHere2017 project to bring into focus the human lives inside the towers; to bring to the fore questions regarding how the residents feel about the coming dislocation of their lives. How much does this capitalistic society care about how the residents feel? Has the documentary modified the hostility of the private owners within and around the estate? It is difficult to measure, but recent efforts by the City of Sydney—the relevant local government authority—to advocate for major changes to the redevelopment plan indicates that the efforts of tenants to have their voices heard have had some effect.

Regardless, the idea that social welfare was the province of a benevolent state is in swift decline. Whatever form the redeveloped Waterloo will take, public housing will be administered through community housing providers—in other words, it will be privatised. The battle for old Waterloo may have already been lost, however, thanks to the documentary, the efforts of residents to prevent its destruction now remains as a matter of public record. Our neighbourhood may go, but it will also remain.

Catherine Skipper, 2019

Contesting stigmatisation

As we have mentioned, public housing estates in Australia are intensely stigmatised, and the Waterloo estate is perhaps the most intensely so.

TGON contests the stigmatisation of public housing tenants and *territorial* stigmatisation (Wacquant, 2008) of estates in several ways. Two distinct but related discursive strategies are used. Firstly, possessive claims to the estate: denoted by the collective personal "we" (in 'We Live Here') and possessive personal "our" (in 'There Goes Our Neighbourhood'), and further evidenced by the prominence of images and discussion of 'the home' in the documentary and social media campaign (see also Goetz, 2013; Pfeiffer, 2006). The home – as both the dwelling and the community or neighbourhood – is constructed as a place of belonging and a place of ownership; while tenants do not possess the title to their properties, they assert a right to their homes nonetheless. A second, related strategy, is the co-optation of the notion of the estate's exceptionality: while the dominant representation of the estate is of a place of exceptional deprivation and depravity, *TGON* presents a counter-image of exceptional diversity, conviviality, and sociability. Tenants are represented as 'ordinary people' (Watt, 2008), but their collectivity in the estate is portrayed as extraordinary. In doing so, *TGON* challenges some of the most pernicious discourses that undergird the stigmatisation of public housing: concentrated disadvantage, lack of social mix, and fecklessness and dependence.

Discourses on concentrated disadvantage and social mix imply that public housing residents face broadly similar conditions and causes of poverty and social exclusion, one of which is the estates themselves – purported to intensify disadvantage by concentrating it and thus enabling the circulation of noxious norms, behaviours, and expectations (August, 2014; Darcy, 2013; Slater, 2013). 'Deconcentration' thus becomes a solution to disadvantage; mixed tenure or 'social mix' supposedly disrupts the communication of these 'poverty pathogens' (August, 2014) through financial investment and the 'role model' behaviour of middle class homeowners and private renters. *TGON* challenges the assumptions about public housing tenants that undergird this discourse by telling a range of stories about how people became residents of the Waterloo estate. For the most part, the documentary sympathetically portrays diverse pathways into public housing yet avoids paternalistic overtones. Public housing is represented as a vital form of social support that anyone might, through bad luck or circumstances, find themselves needing. This is contrary to the discourse of deserving versus undeserving tenants or notions of an 'underclass' that prevail in discussion and debates about public housing in Australia (Jacobs et al., 2011; Jacobs & Flanagan, 2013). However, this representation also reproduces territorial stigma in a subtle and unintentional way, by portraying the estate as somewhere one "ends up" and would not otherwise wish to live. For instance, the narrator describes two of the central characters in the documentary thus:

> *Like most public housing tenants, Mary didn't always need the government to put a roof over her head. (*Lewis, 2018*)*

> *Like many of his neighbours, Richard never thought he'd end up in public housing. (*Lewis, 2018*)*

As Catherine's comments attest, this is not necessarily the way that all tenants understand their situation; many see living in Waterloo as vibrant and empowering. It is understandable that a documentary addressing a wider public, whose attitudes toward public housing and this particular estate are shaped by such vicious and prolonged pathologisation, would use such a rhetorical device to challenge the dominant representation of tenants as undeserving the real estate they inhabit (or indeed any state support at all). Thus, we highlight this tension not simply to criticise *TGON* but to reiterate Garbin and Millington's (2012, p. 2079) argument that resistance to territorial stigma cannot help but reproduce it; that while it "can never proceed from a position 'beyond' … territorial stigma" it simultaneously produces alternative representations, imaginaries, and social relations.

TGON also contests discourses on concentrated disadvantage and social mix by highlighting the ethnic, cultural, sexual and gender diversity of the Waterloo estate – the alternative forms of 'social mix' that many tenants pointed to when confronted with the claim that the redevelopment would make the area more diverse. Government discourse on social mix erases the extant diversity or social mix of many estates. To counteract this, *TGON* takes its viewers into the estate's interior and introduces them to a neighbourhood comprised of people of many different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, including some of its main characters. The #WeLiveHere2017 social media campaign was also important in this regard, featuring digital portraits of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people of colour, people of diverse gender identities, and a range of religious affiliations. These cultural products go 'inside' a territory which is typically viewed in abstract or from a distance, providing 'insider views' (Cuny, 2019) which bring the everyday conviviality and place attachment of estate residents into relief in ways that contradict its representation as replete with criminality and social exclusion.

Finally, the documentary also takes its audience inside the resistance to the redevelopment, through both the organisation of the #WeLiveHere2017 community art project and WPHAG. It contests the dominant representation of public housing tenants as dependent, feckless and incapable by showing the dedication and perseverance of tenants in their struggle over the estate, particularly through its three main protagonists. As Catherine mentioned above, it is significant that two of these protagonists – Mary and Bex – are single mothers, one a woman of colour and one a resident of Waterloo since childhood; in short, they occupy intensely stigmatised positionalities (see, for example, Allen et al., 2014; Tyler, 2013). However, their depiction in *TGON*

contests this stigmatisation, highlighting their tireless organising work for #WeLiveHere2017, their work of care and social reproduction, and their paid work and efforts to secure it. Bex and Mary thus refute representations of public housing tenants as lazy and dependent on 'hand-outs', and in one scene directly challenge such derogatory remarks made in response to a #WeLiveHere2017 Facebook post.

Engaging an audience

We have argued that *TGON* challenges the dominant representations of public housing tenants while also reproducing them in subtle ways. However, to attempt to understand how effectively #WeLiveHere2017 and *TGON* destigmatise public housing, we must trace their impacts on different audiences, and on urban policy and practice, and understand the performative role of the documentary, light sculpture and digital storytelling within public housing activism. The #WeLiveHere2017 team aimed to circulate *TGON* as widely as possible, to take their message 'mainstream'. They therefore sought and secured a broadcast deal with the national public broadcaster, the ABC. It first aired on the 20th of November 2018, to approximately 188,000 viewers. It was accessible for several months thereafter on the ABC's streaming service, as well as through public and university libraries (where it remains available). As such, we can assume that *TGON* reached a fairly wide audience, numbering in the hundreds of thousands. However, 'going mainstream' required some concessions and compromises. Documentaries must narratively persuade their audiences, and they do that most successfully through identification and transportation (Balfour, 2020). In constructing characters and conflicts with which the audience can identify and empathise or sympathise, some things must go unseen and unsaid. We expand on this discussion in the next section.

The production of *TGON* might therefore reveal some of the limitations of documentary-making in the context of resistance politics. However, as we have discussed, it was but one component of a complex assemblage of social media, websites, petitions, crowdfunding campaigns, photography, community events, public art, screenings and so on. Like many recent documentaries, *TGON* was part of a 'transmedia storytelling' (Jenson, 2006) which gained attention and credibility through multiple media. It was the illumination of the towers, more than the documentary itself, that mobilised mass engagement and participation in the local struggle over the Waterloo estate. While the release of the documentary did not occur until late-2018, the light sculpture and social media campaign had immediate effect, and made the documentary possible by creating a plotline that brought key characters together around a shared activity that was filmable and

watchable. The light sculpture opened up the space necessary for people to participate in social action where they otherwise might not have, for fear of reprisal.

In her analysis, Guppy (2019) argues that the lighting sculpture acted as a medium for 'cultural interaction' and for the community's voices to speak to others and be heard at a time when their neighbourhood is threatened by redevelopment. The project transformed the tower blocks from a symbol of poverty into something 'compelling enough to photograph' (Guppy, 2019). Balfour (2020, p. 36) frames social media engagement within Nash and Corner's (2016) notion of a strategic impact documentary, in that if the impact is social action 'there is an emphasis not only on creating an online community who will bond with each other but also one which will deliberate the issues and play an active role in the dissemination of the media message'. Some disparaging social media comments notwithstanding, this this was the case with #WeLiveHere2017. The prominence of the towers on the inner-city landscape and skyline meant that the lighting sculpture had a captive audience of inner-city dwellers, commuters and visitors. Their photogenic nature helped attract not only traditional news media but also social media, via the team's own channels and those of amateur and professional photographers. That audience was kept engaged with other social media content, particularly stories and portraits of estate residents that drew attention to their struggles. #WeLiveHere2017's sustained audience engagement on social media platforms was used as evidence to support an application for funding from various sources, including the City of Sydney's Art and About programme, Documentary Australia, and individual donors. Thus, social media engagement was also meaningful in the context of documentary funding arrangements.

Of course, an important audience for *TGON* is the people within it and represented by it: the Waterloo community. The producers were concerned about their ethics and accountability to the stories they told (Condie & Lewis, 2017), something that is perhaps easier when the filmmakers belong to, and reside within, the communities portrayed. The documentary seeks to serve the community in that, as Clare wrote, it 'provides at least one lens on the burden borne by [them]' and broadcasts their stories within their community as well as more widely. Catherine confirmed that residents were 'delighted to see people they knew given media exposure'. If and when residents move, and as their memories fade and their energies are depleted by convoluted planning and relocation processes, *TGON* will be an important reminder of what they achieved. Furthermore, as we discuss in the concluding section, *TGON* joins a growing archive of films about housing struggles, and may inspire resistance elsewhere and in the future.

Navigating competing and conflicting interests

As we have alluded, the producers and organisers behind *TGON* and #WeLiveHere2017 had to balance competing interests and power conflicts to successfully mobilise and circulate their message. One area of conflict and compromise was the relationship between the project and the NSW Government. Given that *TGON* and #WeLiveHere2017 were practices of resistance as well as documentation and communication, they were met with government efforts to co-opt and obscure their message and their defiance. The relationship between #WeLiveHere2017 team and the state housing authority was strained, perhaps unsurprisingly given that #WeLiveHere2017 and *TGON* took a critical stance towards Waterloo's gentrification and the redevelopment of the estate. This troubled the state government's narrative of 'revitalisation'. In the post-political city, however, those engaged in political resistance often find themselves intertwined in the very institutions and processes they attempt to resist (Rosol, 2014). The #WeLiveHere2017 production team required a permit from the housing authority for their launch event on the estate. In what was a pivotal documentary plot point, the permit was offered on the condition that the documentary trailer was taken down and edited to remove the phrase 'hordes of developers' as well as images of building demolitions. This ultimatum highlights the complexities of protest action: in order to stage a community event to demonstrate resistance to the government's plans, the group was required to seek permission from the very agencies at whom their efforts were targeted. Ultimately, a decision was made to edit the trailer, though this did not have unanimous support; several community members maintained that a defiant stance would have been more appropriate.

A similarly complex situation unfolded after the launch event, with the NSW Government's appropriation of #WeLiveHere2017 imagery in the newsletters they circulated to update tenants on the redevelopment. This image of colourfully-illuminated towers, shown in Figure 2, blurred the distinction between #WeLiveHere2017 and the ongoing consultation and masterplanning processes. It can be read as an attempt to undermine the more radical community demands represented in the light sculpture and draw an equivalence between the #WeLiveHere2017 project and the government's superficial consultation process. Such efforts to blur the lines between participation and protest emerge frequently in the post-political city (Rosol, 2014), with authorities working to obscure distinctions between groups and to present the state as a neutral arbiter, rather than a participant in an adversarial conflict. The appropriation of this imagery likely served to further confuse some residents, many of whom were overwhelmed and bewildered by the profusion of communications and activities run by both

Figure 2. #WeLiveHere2017 imagery featured in redevelopment newsletter, February 2018.

government agencies and non-government organisations throughout the masterplanning process.

The documentary was also shaped by the state in a more subtle way, insofar as it had to meet the explicit and implicit requirements of the public broadcaster. As Catherine outlined above, this is reflected in the name of the documentary. It was the producers' original intention to name it 'We Live Here', following the wider project; however, it was renamed following the ABC broadcast deal. 'There Goes Our Neighbourhood' invokes a less defiant or confrontational response and a more mournful or rueful one. Other tensions related to the depiction of intra-community dynamics. The demands of public television strongly encouraged editing of the footage in a direction that deviated from community members' experiences and interpretations of the situation. The filmmakers recognised that, while they may have wished to portray the complex relationships and conflicts between tenants involved in resisting the redevelopment, a simplified narrative was required by the broadcaster and audience. For example, a dispute between two characters – one an Aboriginal woman and long-time community activist, the other an older, white male tenant who had assumed a position of leadership – was portrayed as purely a dispute over strategy, whereas in fact it also related to the latter's behaviour and his treatment of others. While the TGON's production team made efforts to leave traces of 'reality', it was likely only perceptible to those intimately involved in tenant activism and the lighting project.

As Clare emphasises in her reflection, documentary-making is more an exercise in crafting a truthful narrative than revealing a singular and objective truth. The goal of *TGON* was to celebrate the Waterloo estate and challenge dominant representations, the achievement of which demanded some things be left on the cutting room floor. There were some realities that the producers strategically omitted due to their concerns about perpetuating stigma. Cognisant

that images of poverty, addiction and ill health dominate portrayals of public housing, they were careful not to devote excessive attention to these issues or to present them voyeuristically, so as to maintain the documentary's focus on community organising and resistance and to counteract these harmful representations. As Catherine noted above, 'the documentary was heavily edited to manage the massive amount of footage, and shaped in certain ways to turn the residents' reactions into entertaining television'. The result is a counter-representation of the Waterloo estate that captures that which dominant portrayals do not – not a totalising and transparent depiction of life in the estate, but a view through a different window, hiding some things while placing others in sharper relief (Bourdieu, 1989).

#WeLiveHere2017 and *TGON* both encouraged a subordinated social group to develop a political identity and collective demands while also contesting dominant public perceptions in a wider public sphere (Fraser, 1990). Had the documentary been produced primarily for an audience of tenants, housing researchers and housing activists, it might have told a somewhat different story. Yet, as we have discussed, the documentary, light sculpture and social media campaign were intended for both local and general audiences, to recognise and mobilise the former and to challenge, unsettle and inspire the latter. Conflict and compromise were an unavoidable outcome of this ambitious project. As Negt and Kluge (1993) might put it, these conflicts are inevitable in such attempts to bridge public and counterpublic address – to communicate to both a general public and to a community that is marginalised within that public.

Conclusion

TGON and #WeLiveHere2017 have been part of a decade-long process of repoliticising public housing in Australia, of reframing public housing as a vital pillar of social justice and the welfare state rather than a vector of dependence and deprivation. Voices from the left of Australian politics have increasingly called on governments to reverse the trend of diminishing funds for housing assistance and build new social or public housing at a scale reflecting need. Sadly, however, this is yet to translate into policy change. Despite the prominence of housing affordability issues in recent elections, the party with the least progressive housing policies in 2019 won in both NSW and federally. Furthermore, estate redevelopment in Waterloo and elsewhere did not figure whatsoever within civil society campaigns for social and affordable housing.

Yet politics is not limited to the electoral. Both the documentary and the art project itself were instrumental in building relationships between tenants and other local residents, as well as artists, activists and academics – individuals who may otherwise have had little interaction. This social

capital was mobilised in subsequent forms of community activism, such as a successful campaign to stop the closure of the Waterloo library by a group of local women from both public and private housing. Some Waterloo tenants continue to use the lights set up in their windows for the art installation, thereby continuing to express their feelings toward the redevelopment in a quiet way. It is perhaps in these smaller acts of resistance that the impacts of *TGON* and #WeLiveHere2017 reveal themselves: encouraging residents to speak up and assuring them that there are others who will also.

The full extent of impacts of *TGON* and #WeLiveHere2017 might not be known for many decades. This is certainly true of a previous documentary about redevelopment in Waterloo, Tom Zubrycki's *Waterloo* (1981). The documentary tells the story of working class residents and the Builders Labourers Federation unionists fighting together to successfully halt the demolition of working class housing in the mid-1970s – demolition that, ironically, would have expanded the Waterloo estate (see Burgmann & Burgmann, 1998). *Waterloo* was screened repeatedly during tenants' organising efforts, serving as inspiration and evidence that if residents fight, they can win (see also Darcy & Rogers, 2014). Inspiring communities to action is a key impact of a documentary (Nisbet & Aufderheide, 2009), and not only within the time and place it is produced. *TGON* records the contemporary efforts of residents in their struggle against neoliberal urban policy, "entwin[ing] the past and present with Waterloo's future" (Condie & Lewis, 2017, p. 9). It is possible—likely, even—that the residents of public housing in Waterloo will be struggling against relocation, stigmatisation and unjust urban policy for decades to come. It is certain that residents of other public housing estates will also; as we have briefly outlined, the redevelopment of the Waterloo estate is in many ways driven by global trends. The documentary lives on in libraries and through social media, not merely for posterity but to guide and inspire these future struggles. It demonstrates some of the tools that politically-motivated documentaries needn't passively observe but can be used as a tool for organising and mobilising resistance. It reveals some of the tensions and limitations that such struggles may face, so that they might avoid those which are avoidable and prepare for those which are not. It forcefully asserts that non-commodified forms of housing, like public housing, are worth fighting for, and that there are people who are up for the fight.

Notes

1. Large sheets of paper used by planning consultants during 'brainstorming' sessions with local residents.

2. *Housos* was a reality television program aired in 2011, which portrayed highly stigmatising depictions of public housing tenants. The program was aired on the public Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), which has a remit to deliver multicultural and multilingual content. 'Houso' is derived from Housing Commission, as the state housing authorities were once known. It is often used as a derogatory term, especially within tabloid newspapers like Rupert Murdoch-owned *Daily Telegraph.* For more on *Housos*, see Arthurson et al. (2014).

Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which this research took place, the Gadigal of the Eora nation. The authors would like to thank the many residents of Waterloo who generously contributed their time and knowledge to our research, film making and writing. Finally, thanks to the editors Dallas Rogers and Emma Power, for inviting our submission to the special issue, and to the three anonymous reviewers for their helpful feedback.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

References

Allen, K., Tyler, I., & De Benedictis, S. (2014). Thinking with 'White Dee': The gender politics of 'Austerity Porn'. *Sociological Research Online*, *19*(3), 256–257. https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.3439

Anderson, K. J. (1993). Place narratives and the origins of inner Sydney's Aboriginal settlement, 1972–73. *Journal of Historical Geography*, *19*(3), 314–335. https://doi.org/10.1006/jhge.1993.1020

Arthurson, K. (2012). *Social mix and the city: Challenging the mixed communities consensus in housing and urban planning policies*. CSIRO Publishing.

Arthurson, K., Darcy, M., & Rogers, D. (2014). Televised territorial stigma: How social housing tenants experience the fictional media representation of estates in Australia. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, *46*(6), 1334–1350. https://doi.org/10.1068/a46136

Atkinson, R., & Jacobs, K. (2008). *Public housing in Australia: Stigma, home and opportunity*. Housing and Community Research Unit, School of Sociology and Social Work, University of Tasmania.

August, M. (2014). Challenging the rhetoric of stigmatization: The benefits of concentrated poverty in Toronto's Regent Park. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, *46*(6), 1317–1333. https://doi.org/10.1068/a45635

August, M. (2016). Revitalisation gone wrong: Mixed-income public housing redevelopment in Toronto's Don Mount Court. *Urban Studies*, *53*(16), 3405–3422. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098015613207

Balfour, V. H. (2020). Likes, comments, action! An examination of the Facebook audience engagement strategies used by strategic impact documentary. *Media International Australia*, *176*(1), 34–51. https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X19897416

Birch, T. (2004). "Who gives a fuck about white society anymore": A response to the Redfern riot. *Overland*, *175*, 18–21.

Bourdieu, P. (1989). Social space and symbolic power. *Sociological Theory*, *7*(1), 14–25. https://doi.org/10.2307/202060

Budarick, J. (2011). Media narratives and social events: The story of the Redfern riot. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *35*(1), 37–52. https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859910396088

Burgmann, M., & Burgmann, V. (1998). *Green bans, red union: Environmental activism and the New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation*. UNSW Press.

Colangelo, D. (2019). We live here: Media architecture as critical spatial practice. *Space and Culture [Culture]*, 120633121984380–120633121984316. https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331219843809

Condie, J., & Lewis, C. (2017, March). The lights are on, somebody's home. *Around the House*, *108*, 18–20.

Cuny, C. (2019). Residents' responses to 'Territorial Stigmatization': visual research in Berlin. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *43*(5), 888–913. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12693

Darcy, M. (2013). From high-rise projects to suburban estates: Public tenants and the globalised discourse of deconcentration. Cities, *35*, 365–372. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2012.10.010

Darcy, M., & Rogers, D. (2014). Inhabitance, place-making and the right to the city: Pubic housing redevelopment in Sydney. *International Journal of Housing Policy*, *14*(3), 236–256. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616718.2014.934157

Darcy, M., & Rogers, D. (2016). Place, political culture and post-Green Ban resistance: Public housing in millers point. Cities, *57*, 47–54. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2015.09.008

Eastgate, J. (2016). *Issues for tenants in public housing renewal projects: Literature search findings (2016 update)*. Shelter NSW.

Foley, G. (2001). Black power in Redfern 1968–1972. *The Koori History Website*. http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/essays/pdf_essays/black%20power%20in%20redfern%201968.pdf

Fraser, N. (1990). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. Social Text, *23/26*(25/26), 56–80. https://doi.org/10.2307/466240

Garbin, D., & Millington, G. (2012). Territorial stigma and the politics of resistance in a Parisian Banlieue: La courneuve and beyond. *Urban Studies*, *49*(10), 2067–2083. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098011422572

Goetz, E. G. (2013). The audacity of HOPE VI: Discourse and the dismantling of public housing. Cities, *35*, 342–348. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2012.07.008

Greenland, H. (2014, April 26). Block politics in Redfern. *Sydney Morning Herald*. https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/block-politics-in-redfern-20140425-379y3.html

Guppy, M. (2019). Art, communities, and housing form: A Practitioner's perspective. In K. Bishop, N. Marshall, & N. Marshall (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of people and place in the 21st-century city* (pp. 53–64). Routledge.

Jacobs, K., Arthurson, K., Cica, N., Greenwood, A., & Hastings, A. (2011). *The stigmatisation of social housing: Findings from a panel investigation (No. 166)*. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.

Jacobs, K., & Flanagan, K. (2013). Public housing and the politics of stigma. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, *48*(3), 319–337. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1839-4655.2013.tb00285.x

Lees, L. (2014). The urban injustices of new labour's "New Urban Renewal": The case of the aylesbury estate in London. *Antipode*, *46*(4), 921–947. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12020

Lees, L., Butler, T., & Bridge, G. (2012). Introduction: Gentrification, social mix/ing and mixed communities. In L. Lees, T. Butler, & G. Bridge (Eds.), *Mixed communities: Gentrification by stealth?* (1st ed., pp. 1–14). Bristol University Press.

Lewis, C. (2018). *There goes our neighbourhood*. ABC.

Morris, A. (2016). *A contemporary forced urban removal: The displacement of public housing residents from Millers Point, Dawes Point and the Sirius Building by the New South Wales Government*. Shelter NSW.

Nash, K., & Corner's, J. (2016). Strategic impact documentary: Contexts of production and social intervention. *European Journal of Communication*, *31*(3), 227–242. https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323116635831

Negt, O., & Kluge, A. (1993). *Public sphere and experience: Toward an analysis of the bourgeois and proletarian public sphere*. University of Minnesota Press.

Nisbet, M. C., & Aufderheide, P. (2009). Documentary film: Towards a research agenda on forms, functions, and impacts. *Mass Communication and Society*, *12*(4), 450–456. https://doi.org/10.1080/15205430903276863

Perheentupa, J. (2020). *Redfern: Aboriginal activism in the 1970s*. Aboriginal Studies Press.

Pfeiffer, D. (2006). Displacement through discourse: Implementing and contesting public housing redevelopment in cabrini green. *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development*, *35*(1), 39–74.

Redfern Oral History Project. (n.d.). Timeline. Redfern Oral History Project. Retrieved May 31, 2019, from http://redfernoralhistory.org/Timeline/Timeline/tabid/239/Default.aspx

Rosol, M. (2014). On resistance in the post-political city: Conduct and counter-conduct in Vancouver. *Space and Polity*, *18*(1), 70–84. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2013.879785

RWA. (2011). *Draft redfern-waterloo built environment plan stage 2 (BEP2)*. New South Wales Government.

Shaw, W. S. (2011). *Cities of whiteness*. John Wiley & Sons.

Slater, T. (2013). Your life chances affect where you live: A critique of the 'Cottage Industry' of neighbourhood effects research. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *37*(2), 367–387. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2013.01215.x

Troy, P. N. (2012). *Accommodating Australians: Commonwealth government involvement in housing*. Federation Press.

Tyler, I. (2013). *Revolting subjects: Social abjection and resistance in neoliberal Britain*. Zed Books Ltd.

Wacquant, L. (2008). *Urban outcasts: A comparative sociology of advanced marginality* (1st ed.). Wiley.

Watt, P. (2008). Underclass' and 'ordinary people' discourses: Representing/re-presenting council tenants in a housing campaign. *Critical Discourse Studies*, *5*(4), 345–357. https://doi.org/10.1080/17405900802405288

Wynne, L., & Rogers, D. (2020). Emplaced displacement and public housing redevelopment: From physical displacement to social, cultural, and economic replacement. *Housing Policy Debate*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2020.1772337

Zubrycki, T. (Director). (1981). *Waterloo* [Film]. Australian Screen Online.