The tenants’ movement: the domestication and resurgence of collective action in social housing

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Abstract

The tenants’ movement in English social housing has been institutionalised by technologies of collaborative governance and eclipsed by the rituals of public participation. Once characterised as an urban social movement, it is now fragmented and co-opted, enabled by the managerial strategies of housing organisations and appearing to exist only as the outcome of tenant participation policies. This study, however, evidences the continuing contentions of collective action within this ‘domesticated’ social movement and charts the resurgent challenge it presents to the imposition of consensus around a new social settlement and a restructured welfare state. In a radical inversion of the traditional narrative of movement institutionalisation, pushing forward the boundaries of governance theory, and uniting social movement theory and housing policy for the first time since the 1980s, this research demonstrates how a contentious movement emerges from the regulated practices of participation and evidences the construction of oppositional identities and new articulations of social citizenship. It advances the understanding of tenant collective action in social housing and provides a challenging study of the ability of contemporary social movements, especially ‘poor people’s movements’, to shape the debate around public services and engage with the unfinished project of welfare reform.
Declaration

I confirm that the thesis is my own work; and that all published or other sources of material consulted have been acknowledged in notes to the text or the bibliography.

I confirm that the thesis has not been submitted for a comparable academic award.
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Chapter 1
Introduction: the disappearance of a social movement

If housing is the wobbly pillar under the welfare state (Torgerson 1987), the self-organisation of tenants known as the tenants’ movement has proved itself the most insubstantial of social movements. Once designated an urban social movement (Castells 1978), and more recently characterised as a ‘poor people’s movement’ (Somerville 2005a), the collective action of tenants in England appears to have been snuffed out by the individualising effect of decades of welfare state reform. The social housing sector has served as a test bed for the transformative forces that have restructured public services (Goodlad 1997, Boyne & Walker 1999), and the tenants’ movement has been the first movement of welfare service users to be reconfigured by the process; engulfed by the public policy of participation, its members regulated as surrogate managers (Sullivan 2001), atomised into individual consumers and written out of policy discourse as the unrepresentative congregation of the ‘usual suspects’ (Barnes et al 2003, Millward 2005b).

The aim of this research is to investigate the contemporary manifestation of a tenants’ movement in the English social housing sector; its objectives, organisation and beliefs; to understand its ‘domestication’ in housing policy, and to establish a conceptual framework to debate its potential resurgence. This study re-asserts the connection between housing and social movement theory broken in the late-1980s to return academic attention to the collective action of tenants within the public policy of participation. In offering the first study of the contemporary tenants’ movement in England it provides a challenging account of the ability of contemporary social movements, especially ‘poor people’s movements’, to shape the debate around public services and engage with the unfinished project of welfare reform. Its innovative contribution to research across both fields is to present a radical inversion of the traditional narrative of movement institutionalisation to advance the understanding of governance in housing studies while offering social movement theory a new framework for interrogating the potential of co-opted social movements.
The tendency for contentious protests to become institutionalised and co-opted by state institutions has haunted social movement studies (Zald & Ash 1966, McCarthy & Zald 1977, Jenkins & Eckert 1986, Taylor 1989). Urban movements have been particularly prone to these dynamics, enmeshed as they are in the intricacies of welfare systems and municipal processes of government (Mayer 2000, Pruijt 2003, Kavoulakos 2006). The restructuring of welfare services and the shrinking of the state propagated by market theory provides a conducive climate for the absorption of social movements in the construction of new networks of collaboration and partnership (Somerville 2004, Stoker 2004). Contemporary theorisations of governance have repositioned social movements inside a sophisticated conceptualisation of collaborative power relations and stressed the regulatory impact of technologies of citizenship that rely on the freedom of subjects to regulate themselves (Cruikshank 1999, Dean 1999). This deployment of Michel Foucault’s (1991) theory of governmentality has strengthened belief in the inevitability of the co-option of social movements, illustrating as it does ‘the amazingly absorbent quality of liberal-democratic regimes’ (Saunders 1979: 130). In housing studies it has provided a number of insightful approaches to tenant participation (for example in Flint 2003, 2004a, 2004b, McKee & Cooper 2008, McKee 2009b, 2010) but the effect may have been to reduce the understanding of contentious politics in this field to the neglect of theorisations of collective action (Clarke et al 2007, McKee 2010).

Applying a conceptual framework drawn from the work of feminist philosopher and queer theorist Judith Butler, this research presents a new analysis of a ‘domesticated’ social movement to reinterpret the traditional narrative of co-option (Butler 2000). As a subject constituted by regulatory discourse, rather than as an external force opposed to it, the social movement can be rethought in richer and more complex ways to theorise political challenge without reference to the polarities of liberation and domination (Cruikshank 1999). This study deepens the analysis of the subject as constituted by power, and at the same time it opens up new ways of theorising collective political engagement and antagonism. Social housing provides a suitable starting point for this project because there – at the seeming forefront of welfare reform (Malpass 2008) – notions of a political citizen have become almost impossible to maintain (Needham 2003).
Theorising the service user in welfare reform

An inescapable torrent of reforms specified by market theory and public choice thought has revolutionised the organisation of welfare services over the last forty years (Self 1993). The thrust of these reforms has been to transfer a free market model to the provision of public services and to privilege consumer choice and market relations of accountability over governance by elected representatives (Clarke, Smith & Vidler 2005). This restructuring of the welfare state has brought the forces of ‘voice’ and ‘exit’ to centre stage, transforming the relations of service users and their understanding of public services (Hirschman 1970). Where opportunities for exit have been limited in public sector monopolies, it has fallen to ‘voice’ or participation to channel this restructuring programme and to challenge universalist notions of the welfare state. In the guise of ‘voice’, public participation is intended to transmit proxy market signals to stimulate business efficacy and exert consumer pressure in public services (Finlaysen 2003). ‘Voice’ attributes identity positions and constitutes social behaviours (Flint 2004b), and in the form of tenant participation in social housing it has worked on the subjectivity of tenants to reconfigure their relationship to the welfare state (Barnes et al 2003, Newman & Clarke 2009).

The rise of public participation has been accompanied by a theorisation of governance that has emphasised the role of partnership and collaboration as the context for experiments with market models of accountability (Newman et al 2004, Stoker 2004). The opportunities for constructing quasi-markets through community ownership or by outsourcing management to voluntary organisations, initiated at an early stage in social housing reform by tenant management organisations and housing co-operatives, have been associated with a process of democratic renewal, as the forging of new lines of accountability and service user empowerment (Clarke & Stewart 1994, Sullivan 2001). This apparent pursuit of community governance has been echoed by communitarian discourses in which notions of dependence on benefits or state services have been contrasted with the responsible behaviour expected from active citizens (Clarke 2005); a theme consistent throughout the restructuring programme, and evidenced in policy statements from Conservative and Labour governments from the mid-1970s. The concept of empowerment, so vital to the aims of public participation, has become understood as a process of behavioural adjustment in which the welfare service user evolves into a rational consumer
able to achieve self-sufficiency in the market place (Hart, Jones & Bains 1997, Flint 2004b). The centrality of the concept of community in public participation appears to suggest more than just a destination for strategies of outsourcing and demunicipalisation. It is the foundation of both a territory in which active citizens can be recruited as agents of government, and a field of operations for disciplinary programmes aimed at activating responsible behaviour (Flint 2003, Imrie & Raco 2003, Marinetto 2003).

Although these identificatory dynamics have nursed predominantly consumerist ambitions, their most promising theorisation has been through the concept of governmentality in which they appear as ‘technologies of the self’, or practices of government that operate through the agency of the governed (Dean 1999). This intellectual framework enables the public service user, or the tenants of social housing in this case, to be conceptualised as a subject constituted by the productive network of power; enabled, empowered, constrained and bounded by the discourses that provide this society’s ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault 1980). This understanding of power, however, with its accompanying tendency to depict public policies like tenant participation as inclusive strategies of governance, problematises the traditional routes for thinking about politics and the challenge of political antagonism. In particular it undermines idealist concepts of ‘the public’ and the ‘public sphere’, requiring them to be reconfigured as aspects of governance and as landscapes of the subject-citizen. It demands that social movements are situated within relations of power, rather than occupying the high-ground of resistance (Cruikshank 1999). Against this backdrop, the outline of a contentious tenants’ movement becomes extremely difficult to discern.

The disappearance of a social movement

‘Whether there really was a tenant movement with a conscious identity and purpose, and if so what its achievements amounted to, is a perplexing question,’ Alison Ravetz (2001: 153) wrote in her history of council housing. The use of the past tense to describe a movement that appears still to be in existence is typical among the handful of housing scholars who have researched tenant collective action. The tenants’ movement is associated with a narrative of struggle, protest and rent strikes that predate the development of tenant participation in social
housing policy. Its history is presented as a game of two halves: before, and after participation. It is difficult now to demonstrate continuity between a tradition of tenant action against landlords and the contemporary participation of tenants in their landlord’s business (Millward 2005a: 2). While the rise of participation in public policy was associated with the demands of social movements for direct democracy (Croft & Beresford 1996), it has long since become political orthodoxy, and tenant participation in housing management is now a managerial initiative to improve accountability, and empower ‘customers’. The voice of tenant collective action has been drowned out in a chatter of focus groups and the background hum of social policy discourses.

The network of local, regional and national tenants’ organisations that is a feature of the English social housing sector is still described by many tenants, some housing and community work professionals and a handful of academics as a tenants’ movement. Tenants have engaged in collection action over the quality and cost of housing since the late 1880s, and tenants associations became a feature of the new council estates built from the 1920s, often organised into federations at city or borough level. A succession of national tenants’ organisations has been constituted since 1937, and nationally organised campaign groups have mobilised around issues such as damp, and system-built tower blocks, while country-wide mobilisations against legislation such as the Housing Finance Act in 1972, and Tenants Choice and the Housing Action Trusts in 1988 have pitted tenants against government housing policy. In recent years tenants campaigns have been associated with the disruption of stock transfer intentions and with resistance to the marketisation of social housing (Schifferes 1976, Englander 1983, Cole & Furbey 1994, Grayson 1997, Watt 2008).

After forty years of participation in social housing policy, however, it is unclear to what extent there remains a tenants’ movement in England and what, if anything, it aims to achieve. While collective action by service users in disability and mental health services has continued to be analysed through social movement theory (Oliver 1990, Barnes 1999, Carr 2007), tenants in social housing have increasingly been configured as individual consumers, or empowered citizens rather than autonomously organised collective actors. Studies of the tenants’ movement have focused on the direct action of past campaigns (see for example Burn 1972, Sklair 1975, Woodward 1991, Shapely
2007), while analysis of tenants as a social movement mobilised around aims and grievances has been limited (Cowley 1979, Oxley 1986, Grayson 1997). There has been no study of the contemporary tenants’ movement, enmeshed as it is in a process of participation with social landlords.

Participation initially generated growth in the number of tenants’ organisations (Cairncross, Clapham & Goodlad 1994) but, more recently it appears to have diminished their influence. In the 1990s, 78 per cent of local authorities and 75 per cent of housing associations supported tenants associations, while eight per cent of housing associations and 20 per cent of local authorities had tenants’ federations (Bines 1991, Aldbourne Associates 2001). The support for participation evidenced by Conservative and Labour governments from the mid-1970s led local authority housing departments and housing associations to encourage the development of tenants’ organisations at both neighbourhood and regional levels. Estate regeneration funding from government investment programmes like the Priority Estates Programme, Estate Action, City Challenge and Single Regeneration Budget was dependent on the involvement of tenants and residents organisations. Compulsory competitive tendering for housing management in 1995, the launch of the Best Value regime and the issuing of government guidance on Tenant Participation Compacts in 1998, and the regulatory pressure of the Housing Corporation, Audit Commission and lately the Tenant Services Authority have all spurred social housing landlords to resource tenants organisations, while funding for tenant management organisations has been available from government since 1986 (Furbey & Wishart 1996, Vincent-Jones & Harries 1998, Hickman 2006).

The last stock-take carried out by Ian Cole and colleagues, and published in 2001, told a very different story. It found landlords replacing tenants associations and federations with participation processes based on market research techniques. More recently a number of local authorities and housing associations have withdrawn funding from their tenants federations and replaced them with customer forums and consumer panels (Morgan 2006, Grayson 2007). During the course of this research a further four tenants’ federations lost their landlord funding or had it frozen pending financial reviews. Out of six regional federations set up after 1997 to mirror the New Labour government’s devolved structure of governance, three had been dissolved, or ceased functioning by 2010 (Housing Corporation 2007, IRIS Consulting 2010). The
remaining borough-wide or landlord-wide tenants’ federations are financially supported by landlords and local authorities through grants, and sometimes through service-level agreements, working to aims compatible with local strategic plans, and many of them are facilitated by participation officers employed by landlords. At national level, the Tenants and Residents Organisation of England (Taroe) adopted government targets in exchange for funding and has recently negotiated an income-generating contract with the housing industry’s professional body.

The contemporary tenants’ movement comprises the national organisation, Taroe, established in 1997, together with national organisations for tenant management and co-operative housing. Taroe has only 230 individual tenants’ groups as members whereas the tenant participation consultancy, TPAS, governed by a management board that includes landlords’ representatives, has a national membership of 1,195 tenant organisations. There are three regional federations (although one, the East Midlands Tenant Participation Forum, includes housing professionals and local elected members), and a further 37 sub-regional tenants federations, 14 of which describe themselves as Tenant Participation Networks or Involvement Groups and in some cases include landlord representatives on their committees, making clear their function as facilitators of participation with housing companies (IRIS Consulting 2010). There exists no definitive list of borough-wide or landlord-wide tenants’ organisations. At the last count there were more than 10,000 local tenants and residents associations on social housing estates and schemes (Aldbourne Associates 2001, Cole et al 2001), but still more local tenants organisations exist as constituted or informally convened panels or forums established by landlords, particularly by housing associations. The line between a self-organised social movement and a landlord-led consultation process is now extremely unclear.

The ‘disappearance’ of the tenants’ movement in tenant participation was predicted in narratives that celebrated its more militant previous episodes and that warned of the perils of co-option and institutionalisation (Cockburn 1977, Lowe 1986, Wood 1994). Participation by tenants has been condensed into a rule-governed, reiterative process, the subject of ‘how to’ manuals for housing practitioners, and tenants, described as customers, are problematised as ‘the usual suspects’ when acting collectively (Cooper & Hawtin 1997, Newman 2001, Millward 2005b). Yet tenant collective action remains a significant feature of the
social housing sector. Three per cent of residents in social housing are members of a tenants' group (CLG 2009c), and according to the 2007-08 Citizenship Survey (CLG 2009d) membership of a tenants' association is the second most common form of ‘civic activism’. It would appear that a tenants’ movement still exists in the contemporary landscape of social housing, although perhaps in a new form, and that it is characterised by its participation rather than its direct action.

The initiative for the development of tenant participation in housing in the late 1960s came partly from tenants’ organisations themselves, and was the outcome of a decade of optimism and aspiration among council tenants no longer willing to accept an authoritarian management style that required them to know their place (Hayes 1988, 1989). While the first schemes to bring participation to housing authorities were, in the words of one eyewitness, ‘manipulative and concessionary and designed to prevent radical change’ (Rao 1984: 104), the tenants’ organisations that tentatively entered into these arrangements did not withdraw. As formal participation, or more accurately consultation (Craddock 1975), spread through local authority landlords and housing associations, tenants continued to find opportunities in the process, and pressed for further involvement (Taylor 1986), although the benefit they obtained was often invisible to outside commentators (Riseborough 1998, Carr, Sefton-Green & Tissier 2001). Much of the criticism of public services, paving the way for the market theories circulated so effectively from the mid-1970s, emerged from the agitation of social housing tenants. Tenants’ organisations seized on opportunities for ‘exit’ in government demunicipalisation programmes to advance an interest in co-operatives, tenant management and tenant control (Ward 1974, Lusk 1997, Wood 1994). Identity positions fashioned from the tenets of market ideology appear to have been utilised by tenants, alongside other service users, to launch claims to rights and to challenge their subjection, applying as leverage the liberty and consumer equality cited in public service reform (Mouffe 2000). This partisan involvement in welfare restructuring by tenants organisations indicates more than a process of co-option or mobilisation as self-governing subjects. Crucially for this research, it suggests that participation may present opportunities for the re-appearance of collective subjects and points to the possibility that these subjects may be able to bring about change.
Social citizenship and the mobilisation of ‘poor people’

Amid concerns with the incorporation of urban movements in the mechanics of municipal governance and welfare systems (Jacobs 1992), a number of studies have focused on the role of social movements in redefining, and making fresh claims on the concept of social citizenship (Lustiger-Thaler & Maheu 1995, Roche 1995, Williams 1999). This has emerged in the study of ‘poor people’s movements’ (Piven & Cloward 1977), mobilisations of the vulnerable and marginalised that have few political resources and yet challenge the organisation and delivery of public services. It has been argued that Frances Fox Piven & Richard Cloward’s concept of ‘poor people’s movements’ provides a useful framework for understanding the contemporary tenants’ movement (Somerville 2005a), since social housing, leached of its most affluent tenants by government policy, has increasingly become home to those in the lowest income groups (Hills 2007). Where the tenants’ movement of the 1960s and 1970s may have been motivated by prosperity (Hayes 1988, Forrest 2010), any tenants’ movement today must contend with vulnerability.

Research into ‘poor people’s movements’ (for example Cress & Snow 1996, Cress 1997, Gamson & Schmeidler 1984, Wright 1997) has reaffirmed the material nature of the struggles of social movements and provided a matrix in which class narratives can coexist with theories of identity. These studies have redirected attention from the well-organised national or international social movement organisations to patterns of collective action that can be more fleeting, ill-defined, and have little obvious effect. The study of ‘poor people’s movements’ asserts a focus on the locality and the neighbourhood, providing examples of how contest over public space can influence social identities and political strategies (Wright 1997). ‘Poor people’s movements’ illustrate the collective action of service users in the restructuring of the welfare state and indicate strongly that the rights of social citizenship, so drastically curtailed by the dominance of market theory, are subject to continuing articulation (Roth 2000).

The rights of citizenship defined by T.H. Marshall under civil, political and social headings have been rolled back in welfare state restructuring to the limited freedoms of the market, while the citizen appears to have been deprived of any status other than economic (Barron & Scott 1992). The agitation of
contemporary social movements, even those immersed in the routine of urban governance, can be interpreted as renewing a contest over citizenship initiated by the ‘social welfare movements’ of the 1970s and early 1980s. The transformation of the welfare state owes as much to the popular struggle of service users as it does to market ideology. Campaigns and service user groups have challenged its false universalism, partial equality and limited rather than inclusive notions of citizenship and demanded a role for citizens in the democratic organisation of public services (Williams 1992, 1999, Carr 2007). For Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) these struggles around social citizenship are attempts to enlarge a concept of the public sphere and to broaden the space in society for claims to equality and liberty. This is a task of establishing ‘counter-publics’, antagonistic spaces that can challenge social inequality and resist the privatisation of the public sphere (Fraser 1992).

The study of the tenants’ movement presented here contributes significantly to this line of argument. In contentions over public space, through concepts of spatial justice, and in its construction of unifying frames around the emotional appeal of universal rights, the tenants’ movement revealed in this research appears to advance a series of fresh claims on social citizenship. This research provides rich data on how marketised definitions of rights are being collectively re-articulated and signified to reclaim a now excluded narrative of social entitlement. The contention made here is that this process of reclamation takes place within, and because of, the domestication of the tenants’ movement in the public policy of participation. It is already widely argued that institutionalisation may not necessarily entail the moderation of a social movement; in this study institutionalisation is a necessary ingredient for a hegemonic challenge to the new social settlement. It is from a foreclosed and quasi-privatised public sphere, the ritualised and regulated forum that is tenant participation, that a new counter-public emerges.

One of the challenges in seeking to analyse the manifestations of a social movement within the complexities of contemporary governance is to demonstrate the effect of such contentious action. Effectiveness was the identifying characteristic of the urban social movement as defined by Manuel Castells (1976), and the study of urban movements has been distinguished from social movement theory in its attention to political opportunity structures and impact on power relations (Pickvance 2003). In rethinking the concept of co-
option, and denying the dualities of liberation or domination it becomes difficult to identify success or failure. This study demonstrates the potential of service users to retain the capacity for collective action within regulatory frameworks, and as collective actors to elaborate notions of public space, defend ideas of universality, and redefine a discourse of marketisation. It provides an innovative account of how oppositional interpretations of identities, interests and needs can be formulated by a contentious movement that is itself the product of constituting discourses of power. However, it manifests too the limitations of these challenges when subjects have few political resources, illustrating the dominance of disciplinary and regulatory forces and their embodied authority to define the boundaries of the possible.

Research frameworks

The objectives of this research are to investigate the processes that enable the mobilisation of a tenants' movement within the relations of participation in social housing, and to critically assess the representations of the tenants’ movement as it appears in academic studies and in the identity work of its participants. The construction and contestation of identity is therefore the central theme of this research and the social movement theories of identity work (Snow & McAdam 2000), and collective identity (Melucci 1989, 1996) provide the rationale for the research strategy and a rigorous matrix through which to assess the properties, qualities, and attributes that might constitute a tenants’ movement. The identity talk (Snow & Anderson 1987) of tenants engaged in formal participation with social housing landlords is the unit of analysis for this study and four research questions guide its progress. The research questions are:

- What identity work processes can be observed in participation that enable and constrain the emergence of a tenants’ movement?
- What identity constructions distinguish a tenants’ movement and provide its defining contentions?
- How is a tenants’ movement mobilised through identity work and how effective is that mobilisation?
To what extent can a collective identity, or the construction of a unified movement with aims, objective and action plans be discerned among tenants engaged in participation?

The theoretical framework that guides the research is drawn from the work of Judith Butler and will be only briefly introduced here and explored in more detail in following chapters. Feminist philosopher Judith Butler provides a rigorous approach to thinking about social movements within the constraints of power. One of her most controversial contributions to academic study is in theorising social movement contestation without attributing to it the traditional agency that allows collective action to appear as an external force to power relations. In returning social movement theory to tenants transfigured by participation this research applies Butler’s theoretical framework, not to study free agents but subjects constituted by discourse. The task of this research, then, is to formulate a specific account of how a social movement can be constituted through power and yet attain the potential to transform that power. Where theorists of governmentality may conceive of freedom of action and the ability to resist as enabled by overlapping and contradictory identifications (Rose 2000), this study encounters subjects constrained and bounded by intersectional power relations embodied over generations. The engine of change lies not in agency but in the inevitable failure of discourse itself to permanently exclude contradictory meanings and identity positions that widen the field of possibility. The social movement is theorised here not as the agent of change but of resignification. Its impact is measured in widening the range of meanings and identities that designate a particular relationship of power, and in creating new hegemonic articulations that shift the boundaries of what it is possible to believe and what it is possible to do.

The tenants’ movement is interpreted as a project of identification that is the outcome of, and a reaction to, a dominant discourse of participation and the overall restructuring of social housing that it conveys. The idea of the tenants’ movement imagined in the community action and urban studies literature of the 1970s and 1980s was constructed around the unifying principle of common material interest, seen as a property of class or market relation (Castells 1978, Saunders 1981, Lowe 1986). This was a venture into identity assemblage and one imposed on, rather than developed by, its recipients. It is argued here that a social movement is not so much a product of material interests, or essential
bonds of commonality, but is, instead, a painstaking process of joint construction, negotiation and argument among participants in which a shared understanding of unity is composed and re-composed (Melucci 1989, Gamson 1992b). This work of collective identity construction is carried out by tenants through a discourse provided by participation in its mercurial dynamic as ‘voice’ and is a project in which dominant narratives are reunited with excluded meanings to forge new interpretations.

In analysing this discursive identity work two concepts central to Judith Butler’s theoretical framework are employed: those of interpellation and performativity. Participation is envisaged as a discourse that interpellates tenants, that is it renders them recognisable as a social category and addresses them as rights-bearing citizens while it enhances their subjection, and compels their obedience. This is a regulatory process that is conducted through the ritualised and routine performances of ‘voice’ as the dominant definition of participation policy, in which projects of collaborative governance and technologies of citizenship are conveyed and increasingly concentrated in quasi-market iterations. But in treating tenant participation as ‘incomplete, open and politically negotiable’ (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 104), this study is guided by an interpretation of ‘voice’ as a performative, in Judith Butler’s (1993) definition, that has the potential to enact a spectrum of citizen-consumer protest, and span a range of action from the individual complaints of the customer to the antagonism of political struggle. Voice is the discursive mechanism that disturbs the fixing of meaning in participation and ensures its identifications are contingent and open to the possibility of change.

As a discourse that constructs subjects and engages subjectivity, participation is a project of identification; it attributes and sets constraints on identity positions, and enables claims to collective identities based on narratives of rights, stigma, class and community (Flint 2004a, 2004b). The tenants’ movement is not an external force that has been incorporated in participation but a process of collective identity construction enabled and constrained by participation. This is what it means to be a ‘domesticated’ movement; constituted by participation and enabled by participation in its potential to bring about change (Butler 2000).
Limits and limitations of research

Some definitions of terms are needed to clarify the focus of this research. Firstly this is a study of the tenants’ movement of England, not the United Kingdom. Housing policy has been devolved to the Scottish Parliament and, in secondary legislative powers, to the Welsh Assembly since 1999 (with full powers granted to Wales in May 2011), and the tenants’ movement, if it can be described as that, has taken distinctive directions in both countries, and its own trajectory in Northern Ireland. In Scotland Community Ownership stock transfer has channelled tenant collective action into a mutual model of management, while in Wales a country-wide tenants’ federation is resourced by the Welsh Assembly, represented in policy making and supported the devolution of housing legislative powers to Wales. The study of the tenants’ movement begins in a specific locality and only through the particular and the local can it begin to make sense, so the limits of this study are essential and productive. Secondly, this study does not attempt to present a chronological history of the tenants’ movement. It is, rather, an analysis of contemporary manifestations of a tenants’ movement contextualised and evidenced from incidents in the movement’s history. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, this is not a study of public participation; it is focused on tenant participation only in so much as that supplies the context for research into the tenants’ movement. The term ‘tenant participation’ is used throughout, in preference to the current usage of ‘resident involvement’ in order to distinguish participation in social housing from other forms of community involvement, citizen governance or civic deliberation. Since participation appears to have absorbed all collective action in the field of social housing, it must provide the area of research in which a tenants’ movement can be discerned. This study defines the ‘movement’ as those tenants participating with their social housing landlord in formal processes. Social housing is the term applied in the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 to describe homes provided by local authorities or registered landlords who are currently all non-profit making housing associations or co-operatives. The term encompasses various forms of shared ownership and its participation processes often involve leaseholders and home owners who advocate on behalf of tenants through representative organisations. For simplicity, the research sample are referred to as ‘tenants’ and this is to be understood to mean tenant representatives. The term ‘council housing’ is only used when referring explicitly to local authority ownership of rented housing to the exclusion of housing associations, and only
when discussing events prior to 1989 when the role of councils as the main providers of public housing ceased.

The sample for this research is drawn from tenants engaged in formal participation processes, ranging from members of autonomous tenants’ organisations, to participants in their landlords’ customer panels, or tenant directors of housing companies and tenant management organisations. The data was collected in audio recordings of 12 focus group discussions and nine semi-structured interviews with a total of 144 tenant participants across the English social housing sector. While this sample sheds light only on the identity work of a small number, it is drawn from the three per cent who take part in formal participation, and reflects upon the 38 per cent of social housing tenants who have less formal involvement with tenants’ organisations (TSA 2009). These research participants are the prime subjects addressed by governmental identifications in the restructuring of public services.

The research findings are interrogated through the social movement technique of frame analysis to demonstrate a distinctive body of beliefs shared among participants. It is from these collective identity frames (Melucci 1995) that a coherent picture emerges of the generation of antagonism and the development of oppositional contentions among social housing tenants. Tenant framing activity provides an intriguing study of how dominant discourses around community and participation can be bridged, extended and transformed to foster conflicting, and potentially counter-hegemonic, arguments. These collective identity frames may designate the outline of a social movement, but the analysis makes clear they lack the mobilising force to do more than foster localised and defensive opposition. The analytical tool of positioning theory reveals the regulatory attributions that embody disablement and dependency in the framing discourse of tenants, and which have the effect of undercutting attempts at mobilisation. Welfare discourses that levy stigmatising effect are seen to undermine the construction of a collective identity that could maintain a united social movement and it is evident the project to reform public services and remodel public service users has had enduring effect.

Tenant collective action, however, retains the ability to disrupt the closure of debate around a new social settlement. In the absence of a unified collective actor, this research coins the term ‘performative social movement’ to
characterise the resurgent challenge expressed in tenant identity talk. The tenants’ movement evidenced in this research is a discursive device utilised by tenants in participation; it is an entity that is talked into existence but has little mobilisation potential, and no distinctive aims or action plans. It is theorised here as the performative enactment of the contentious voice discovered in tenant participation processes. The concept of a performative social movement denotes the constitutive power of regulatory discourse to construct unintended outcomes and to reclaim the identities it intends to foreclose. It expresses both the domestication and resurgence of collective action in social housing, and suggests the political opportunities, as well as the boundaries, of hegemonic articulations.

This research was conducted in a period of enormous and fundamental change in the social housing sector. It began with the establishment of the new regulator, the Tenant Services Authority in 2008 and its foreclosure of participation as a consumer relation. It witnessed the awakening of possibilities suggested by the development of a National Tenants Voice and subsequently saw the abolition of both those bodies, and of the Audit Commission inspection regime that underpinned them, by the Coalition Government. It concluded with a glimpse of the future for social housing set out in the Comprehensive Spending Review (HM Treasury 2010) and Localism Bill 2010-2011, through which the sector was subjected to a package of tenure reform and rent restructuring that one commentator hailed as ‘the death of social housing’ (Brown 2010). This research, then, demonstrates the continuance and resurgence of a subaltern ‘counter-public’ inside a restructured and conditional vision of public services, but also defines its boundaries. The ‘public’ constituted in the transformation of public services remain political citizens; what they appear to lack are the resources necessary to take political action.

Outline of chapters

The search for a tenants’ movement begins in the power relations of participation, understood either as a political opportunity structure in which a social movement has been co-opted or as a social relation that enables the possibility of a social movement. Chapter 2 examines the removal of all discussion of power in explanations of participation and its depiction through
market-like models of voice and deliberation. Reflecting on the importance of theories of governance in conceptualising participation, Chapter 2 advances an innovative framework based on the political philosophy of Judith Butler to position participation as a regulatory discourse that attributes identities and engenders subjectivity, and that constitutes a tenants’ movement at the same time as it domesticates it.

Chapter 3 explores the representations of a tenants’ movement in the urban studies and community action literature of the 1970s and early 1980s, locating the source of its portrayal as an urban social movement in theories of objective material interest. The chapter dissects the attribution of a radical history to the tenants’ movement and scrutinises the contemporary manifestations of material interest in the portrayal of tenants as consumers. Through a detailed assessment of the construction of unifying narratives it presents the social movement theory of collective identity as a framework through which to understand the process of forging and mobilising a tenants’ movement. Building on the formative role of identity work in the construction of social movements, Chapter 4 advances a research strategy to analyse the identity talk of tenants engaged in participation in social housing. The obstacles to defining a tenants’ movement, and the nebulous status it enjoys are explored in setting out the sampling strategy, and the focus throughout is on the construction of a movement imaginary, the piecing together of commonality and the representation of a collective, centred around Alberto Melucci’s robust definition of collective identity.

In Chapter 5 the identity processes entailed in tenant participation are explored in the fieldwork and interpreted through Judith Butler’s concept of interpellation. The chapter analyses the stigmatising discourses that motivate tenants to seek recognition as citizens in the processes of participation and explores the contradictions in their claims to equality. It reveals the awakening of subjectivity and power engendered by participation discourses and explores too, the regulatory limits of that subjectivity. In illustrating the potential of tenants to reclaim excluded themes of rights and citizenship the chapter indicates the evolution of a tenants’ movement from the disciplinary processes of participation. This awakening of a social movement is the subject of Chapter 6 which demonstrates how notions of a political public are articulated within the regulated rituals of participation. It observes the construction of boundary
markers that delineate a tenants’ movement and provide it with a history, and a language with which to articulate its vision. This three-part vision is then examined through the social movement technique of frame analysis beginning with the articulation of a cluster of associated meanings around social housing and community. The framing activity analysed in this chapter articulates a commitment to a mass or universal model of social housing and the construction of identities around neighbourhood, public space and collective action. This theme is developed further in Chapter 7 which investigates the elaboration of two more interpretative frames around the value of experiential knowledge and an advocacy of participatory and direct democracy. These collective identity frames challenge the power relations embedded in housing organisations and champion a model of direct democracy and popular participation in which decision-making is devolved to the locality and rooted in direct experience.

Chapter 8 undercuts the contentions of these framing activities to investigate their mobilising potential and draws attention to the failure of assumptions of common cause to generate movement organisation. Identifications of apathy drawn from divisive strategies of welfare reform are shown to be routinely used to argue against organisation building, while a devastating lack of self-worth blocks any articulation of strategy. Drawing on this analysis, Chapter 9 attempts to assess the extent to which tenant identity work constructs a tenants’ movement with aims and action plans, and examines its organisational ability, its resources and ability to exploit its political opportunities. The chapter investigates the movement’s localism and its perceptions of the role of a national organisation, the need to mobilise to meet both the opportunities of collaborative governance and the centralisation of decision-making that lies behind it. Finally Chapter 10 concludes that weaknesses in mobilisation and strategy mean that the tenants’ movement remains a performative social movement, rather than a unified collective actor. The contentious identities that shape this tenants’ movement, however, demonstrate a continuing conflict over the project of welfare reform, and evidence an unfinished debate over the future of social housing, and the meaning of community, empowerment and participatory democracy.
Chapter 2
Power and Participation

In 1971 when the tenants’ federation in the London borough of Lambeth was invited to join a new tenant participation committee set up by their local authority ‘they gave a lot of thought to the proposal’ (Craddock 1975: 37). They called instead for decision-making power and a seat on the Housing Committee. They wanted the ability to resolve the problems on their estates; so they asked for control over housing budgets and the ability to get things done (Derricourt 1973). Instead they got five places on a consultative sub-committee where they could take part in ‘council decision-making with tenants’ views’ (Craddock 1975: 54). It was a trade-off that came to typify the tenant experience of participation and one that provided ample evidence for those who warned of the institutionalisation and co-option of an urban movement.

For campaigners involved in housing struggles over rents and urban renewal, property speculation and the crisis of homelessness in the early 1970s, the rise of tenant participation was a predictable attempt to incorporate and disarm a radical social movement that had proved itself capable of major disruption in a country-wide rent strike (Ward 1974, Cockburn 1977a). Housing academics and theorists shared this viewpoint on the whole, perceiving the growth of participation as a relation of power in which state agencies sought to co-opt tenants organisations, to win their support and shift responsibility for unpopular decision-making onto their shoulders (Saunders 1979, Lowe 1986, Hague 1990, Cairncross, Clapham & Goodlad 1994, Grayson 1997, Riseborough 1998, Goodlad 2001). Tenant sources, although fully aware of the limitations of participation, appeared to discern some benefits from their involvement with their landlords, however. In the London tenant federations participation was seen as the beginning of a process of change in power relations: ‘tenant participation is useful as a strategic tactic in a struggle for change’ said one eyewitness (Rao 1984: 102) while a report for the London-wide tenants organisation concluded that participation was ‘a step towards tenants having control over decisions concerning their estates’ (Craddock 1975: 57).
As the author of the first manual of tenant participation, Ann Richardson (1983: 5) said:

‘If some argue that participation is a significant means of increasing the influence of the new participants, and others contend that it is instead a devious means of decreasing it, someone must indeed be incorrect.’

Tenant participation appears both to reinforce existing power relations and point towards the way they can be changed. It is clear that any attempt to understand the contemporary tenants’ movement must start with an analysis of the power relations of participation. The following chapter explores the theories advanced by housing scholars to make sense of the unequal relationship of power between tenants and the authorities whose decision-making processes they seek to influence and to understand why, despite that inequality, tenants’ organisations have seen opportunities in participation policy to challenge traditional power relations and to advance their interests. It then applies the work of feminist philosopher Judith Butler to analyse the power relations at work within participation policy and to provide this study with a robust theoretical framework through which to conduct its critical research into the tenants’ movement.

**Theorising power in participation**

Ann Richardson’s account of participation, published when this was still a new concept in social policy, begins by denying that power has any relevance to the debate. ‘The key dimension for a definition of participation should not concern power at all,’ she wrote (1983: 27). ‘It is the existence of access, and therefore interaction, between the groups involved.’ She allowed that an assessment of the relative power of the parties involved in participation may be useful in order to predict the outcome, but claimed the opportunities to influence decision-makers could not be judged with any certainty on the basis of an assessment of structures, formal powers, or entrenched interests; instead participation establishes a new relationship in which service users and service providers vie with each other to achieve their aims. ‘All systems of consumer participation may enable consumers to wield some power, to get in practice what they want and all may enable power to be exercised against them. Neither they nor the
service providers can be certain of the direction such power can take’, Richardson noted (1983: 83).

To support this argument Richardson turned to game theory and presented tenant participation as a non-zero sum process of bargaining in which tenants and housing providers both gain from co-operation, though one may gain more, and from which no single outcome can be predicted from the start. In the new relationship enabled by participation the two parties find they have some conflicting interests and some that are congruent and that a win for one party does not necessarily mean a loss for the other; they bargain and may achieve gains, or make losses, or end in stalemate. This application of game theory found support from Liz Cairncross, David Clapham and Robina Goodlad (1994) who theorised the power relations of tenant participation through Stewart Clegg’s notion of ‘circuits of power’, where the focus is on agents and their games in a shifting and unstable world of alliances, flanking manoeuvres and resistance; and where the rules of the game are decided by the skills and strategies of the players. Cairncross and her co-authors applied this framework cogently to examine the relationships between tenant organisations, councillors and housing professionals at a local level of negotiation to explain the benefits that tenants appear to gain from participation. The wins tenants can make depend on the resources available to them and the strategies they apply; the focus is on the time commitment, the facilities, and the expertise that tenants can mobilise to help them achieve influence. The Swedish political scientist, Bo Bengtsson (1995) has also applied game theory to analyse the role of tenants’ organisations. To the model presented by Richardson and Cairncross et al he added the complexity of ‘nested’ games, played on a number of interrelated levels in different arenas where tenants compete or co-operate with politicians and bureaucrats, playing to rules set by the market, or by government policy. Despite the sophistication of Bengtsson’s framework and its attempt to capture the wider policy objectives of tenant participation, game theory assumes that all players are perfectly rational actors pursuing narrowly defined goals, whose only motivation is a selfish desire to maximise their own benefit. These theoretical models of participation imagine a pluralist landscape where tenants appear in the guise of the discerning consumer driven by an appreciation of their economic self-interest (Bengtsson & Clapham 1997), and the arena of participation is imagined as a market-place in which bargains are made and co-operation or competition initiated, and where participation is envisaged as a
market force or an injection of proxy competition into public services in the form of new actors and new tensions. In this scenario, tenant participation in housing policy becomes a two-way process bringing benefits to both landlords and tenants; a partnership agreed by all to be ‘a good thing’ (Riseborough 1998: 221). It is a strangely sanitised process where all power relations are converted to questions of resources and tactics.

These interpretations of the power relations of tenant participation echo a preoccupation in housing policy with the role of ‘voice’ (Gilroy 1998, Carr, Sefton-Green & Tissier 2001). In public choice and rational choice theories, ‘voice’, famously paired with ‘exit’ as Albert Hirschman’s (1970) twin strategies for preventing the decline of firms and organisations, unleashes the unknown power of the consumer into the previously uncompetitive monopoly of public services. Applied to tenant participation, the invocation of ‘voice’ signifies a belief that the mere introduction of a new set of people into the decision-making process carries a transformative force that has power to break down barriers and initiate change. While ‘exit’ has long been a central feature of economics as the response of the market’s invisible hand to deteriorating performance or superior competition, Albert Hirschman imported the concept of ‘voice’ from politics and gave it a free enterprise setting.

‘Voice is here defined as any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs, whether through individual or collective petition to the management directly in charge, through appeal to a higher authority with the intention of forcing a change in management, or through various types of actions and protests, including those that are meant to mobilise public opinion,’ (Hirschman 1970: 30).

The pairing of ‘voice’ with the free market concept of ‘exit’ saw it incorporated as a market-like discipline (Stoker 2004), an essential tool for bringing the semblance of competition to public sector monopolies and promoted as such by theorists seeking to apply a neo-classical model of economic behaviour to public goods and services. ‘Voice’ became enshrined as a transferable suite of participation mechanisms that could be applied to any public sector monopoly or welfare service to trigger consumer pressure as surely and smoothly as market forces (Paul 1992; Rodwin 2000).
Social housing has witnessed a more radical exposition of Hirschman’s ‘exit’ and ‘voice’ than most other public services (Goodlad 1997, Boyne & Walker 1999). As the wobbly pillar of the welfare state, housing has been the least decommodified service and its public provision has been increasingly residualised; access to its shrinking stock has been made conditional on extremes of housing need, and the majority of new lettings have gone to those on the lowest incomes. Social housing now appears a marginal and dispensable constituent of the welfare state and has provided Conservative and Labour governments with an almost uncontested territory in which to experiment with the restructuring of public services, while in its capacity as a private good, market housing has presented a vital resource to sustain a re-commodified welfare system (Malpass 2008). Alongside the imposition of the target-driven, budget-conscious New Public Management, ‘exit’, or ‘choice’ has been exhorted through the privatisation measures of the Right to Buy, the transfer of council housing to registered social landlords, the development of mixed tenure estates, and the creation of quasi-markets in the public sector (Tunstall 2003, Malpass 2005), while ‘voice’ has been engineered through the public policy initiative of tenant participation in social housing. A wide menu of participation opportunities is now offered to housing association and council tenants through the resident involvement strategies of their housing providers. As well as presenting a familiar range of voice options through focus groups, panels, Ombudsman complaints and satisfaction surveys, for some tenants participation has meant the opportunity to select repairs contractors, design the delivery of services, make public spending decisions, plan their future accommodation, manage budgets and staff, lead social housing companies, run their own housing, and take social housing into community ownership (Clapham & Kintrea 2000; Cabinet Office 2005, Paddison, Docherty & Goodlad 2008). In the range of choice and voice processes taking place within tenant participation, the power relations between tenants and landlords, or between tenants and government, have become of less relevance than the games set in motion through the operation of market-like signals. The dominance of this quasi market interpretation, with its focus on agency to the exclusion of structure, and its unspoken assumption of a level playing field for games without frontiers, explains the plethora of ‘how to’ manuals written about tenant participation and the comparative scarcity of analyses of its wider social and political meanings, as Charlie Cooper and Murray Hawtin observed (1997,
Cooper and Hawtin maintained that tenant participation, as it is played out by landlords and tenants’ organisations, takes place in a space that has been already marked out by discourses that define what services are open to participation, what the aim of that participation should be and what outcomes it is expected to have. Where game theory and its application of Hirschman’s ‘voice’ is applied only to the micro level of tenant participation, the space where landlords and tenants negotiate, Cooper and Hawtin presented an analytical framework that integrates this ‘implementation arena’ with the macro level they dubbed the ‘conceptual arena’ where policy aims and objectives are determined. In constructing this analysis they drew on Stephen Lukes’ theory that power is exercised through systems of knowledge and belief that manipulate people’s understanding of their own interests. Asserting that ‘the development of tenant participation since the late 1970s largely coincided with the ascendancy of neo-liberal political economy’ (1997: 279), they argued that the discourses prevalent in the conceptual arena dictate the ‘rules of the game’ or how participation is acted out in the implementation arena. These discourses, promoted through policy and organisational strategies, form the common sense of participation that determines what it is possible for tenants to achieve in negotiation, and that establishes the overall balance of power between tenants and landlords.

While regulatory discourses can be evidenced in tenant participation, the association of this public policy with the tenants’ movement and with the politics of community action has allowed it to be conceptualised through democratic theory as a process of empowerment (Somerville 1998, Paddison, Docherty & Goodlad 2008). One strand in the development of tenant participation originates in a series of tenant protests against a bureaucratic and paternalist housing service, and although most of the participation schemes first recorded by Richardson in the early 1970s were initiated by landlords, demands for participation stemmed from tenants organisations expressing a desire for change in the power relations between landlords and tenants (Hague 1990). The evolution of tenant participation has been best documented in the London boroughs where the drive to establish participation schemes came from the city’s tenants’ federation, the Association of London Housing Estates (ALHE) witnessed by John Hayes (1988, 1989) and Nick Derricourt (1971, 1973). Exasperated by a bureaucratic and paternalist service that treated them ‘simply as housing units’, (as Mike Geater, ALHE secretary put it in his forward to Craddock 1975), the federation took the desire for participation in housing
management and turned it into a co-ordinated and high-level strategy. Four borough co-ordinating committees and a Greater London sub-committee were set up by the tenants’ organisation to give strategic direction to the local participation already taking place between tenants associations and neighbourhood housing managers. This effectively shifted the focus of the organisation away from the provision of training and support to its member groups and towards the development of participation as a public policy (Mayo 1972). The borough co-ordinating committees of the ALHE pursued participation with housing authorities and drove forward the establishment of consultative structures in council housing decision-making processes (Hayes 1988). As Julia Craddock (1975: 3) explained they ‘assumed the functions of policy making and negotiation, or confrontation, when necessary, with the boroughs and Greater London Council’. Mike Geater, secretary of the ALHE, articulated this drive for participation in explicitly rights-based terms:

‘Tenants do have a point of view and as the movement towards tenant participation is gathering momentum [...] it is hoped to evolve a process that allows tenants to express those views, that normally no one is prepared to listen to, a process that will enable them to get their ideas past the bureaucratic barrier to where the decision making takes place, decisions that affect their homes and their lives’ (forward to Craddock 1975).

The perception that participation can be liberatory, that it is about taking power (Grayson 1997), connects a radical narrative of the tenants’ movement and a celebration of its more contentious protests like the rent strikes and street battles that have peppered the history of tenant organisations, with the ideals of equality and self-determination popularised by the protest movements of the 1960s and the so-called ‘new social welfare movements’ of the 1970s (Williams 1992). This interpretation of tenant participation depicts it as the application of collective action in the pursuit of participatory democracy (Paddison, Docherty & Goodlad 2008), ‘perceived as a way to achieve change in a society whose problems are endemic in its very structures’ as Cliff Hague (1990: 244) observed. It is presented as a collective process, and it is tenants’ organisations, not tenants as individual consumers, who are seen as the main actors. For Nancy Fraser these groups are ‘subaltern counter-publics’ who are able to debate questions of needs and public resources within their meetings, and generate their own
strategies for services. They operate as ‘parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs’ (Fraser 1997: 81). In this aspect of participation as collective action, tenants’ organisations are seen to draw on the shared experiences of their members to contribute to policy development and decision-making. As Hilary Wainwright (2003) pointed out, this collective deliberation presents a challenge to the assumption of professional control over how services should be delivered, and as a consequence collective participation appears to champion forms of direct or deliberative democracy (Jensen 1998), with the goal, as Peter Somerville (1998: 235) stated, to secure ‘a permanent shift in the balance of power from landlords to tenants’.

This model of participation associated with social movements and empowerment builds on Albert Hirschman’s original characterisation of ‘voice’ as collective action applied in a political rather than economic context (Hirschman & Nelson 1976: 386), a precedent noted by Somerville (1998). The collective aspect of ‘voice’ appears far removed from its application in neo-liberal market theory, and its appropriation by public choice theorists as a vehicle for reforming public services. The conflation of ‘voice’ with the presumed efficiency and invisibility of market forces left what was essentially a political strategy seriously under-theorised and, as ‘voice’ became enshrined as a quasi-market mechanism, the ‘messy’ complications alluded to in Hirschman’s (1970: 16) original study were brushed aside. ‘Voice’ was primarily seen by Hirschman as a response to a lack of opportunities for ‘exit’; the two strategies were usually to be considered mutually exclusive (1970: 33; 34) with ‘voice’ being the more expensive option in terms of the personal costs involved in organising protest and exerting bargaining power on delinquent organisations. It was therefore a limited strategy that was more often to be applied in a political rather than economic context, and in situations where it was judged likely to be more successful than ‘exit’ or where no alternative was available. This dualism of consumer response was further advanced by Hirschman in characterising ‘exit’ as an individual response and ‘voice’ as collective action. He stressed the explicitly empowering aspect of ‘voice’; it required organisation and was depicted as a response of the powerless, while ‘exit’ was monopolised by the privileged and the mobile (Hirschman & Nelson 1976: 389).
As ‘voice’, participation can be envisaged as a collective, political movement that employs a range of tactics from direct action to negotiation in order to achieve change in organisational policy. To be effective, Hirschman argued, ‘voice’ must sometimes threaten disruption or ‘exit’ to achieve influence; the distinctions between voice and exit can become blurred in hybrids like the boycott or the strike (Freeman 1976). Political protest, riots and revolt are other hybrids of voice and exit (Tajfel 1981: 303); protestors employ ‘voice’ as political action but also threaten ‘exit’ in that they refuse to play by the rules that have disadvantaged them; an analysis applied by Hirschman (1993) in his account of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the German Democratic Republic. In its collective strategies Hirschman’s ‘voice’, then, presents a direct connection between the tenant rent strikes and public protests of the movement’s radical history, and its quieter incarnation in the contemporary processes of participation.

This incorporation of voice as democratic theory (Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995) is reflected in the governmental discourses of empowerment and active citizenship that cluster around participation policies. The reform of public services along market lines has gone hand-in-hand with a governmental desire to reinvigorate the processes of representative democracy and to re-inspire public interest in politics and public respect for politicians (ODPM 2005). Active citizenship and civic participation have been preached by Conservative and New Labour governments (Imrie & Raco 2003, Kearns 1992), and the strategies of neighbourhood agreements, neighbourhood calls to action, participatory budgeting, and community asset transfer point to an aspect of ‘voice’ in which the consumer has societal responsibilities as well as property rights (CLG 2008b). An upsurge of interest in citizens’ juries and other deliberative democratic processes has been accompanied by discussions about co-production or collaborative governance, and tenant participation has been seen as one strand in a wider policy of public participation (Newman et al 2004). The rise of deliberative processes has run parallel to assertions about the failure of representative democracy founded in part on public choice theories in which the ballot box has been equated with the marketplace, and voters depicted as consumers choosing between policies (Hirst 1997). Mechanisms to enhance public involvement in decision-making, based loosely on Jürgen Habermas’ theory of communicative action, mirror a public choice conception of marketised ‘voice’ in attributing transformative effects to the entrance of new players into circuits of governance. Deliberation supposedly takes place between rational
actors in a pubic sphere imagined as a market place in which ‘information is conceived as an objective item of exchange’ (Newman 2001: 132). This is an arena in which there are no power relations or social inequalities, and all parties are equal in deliberation; they are able to rise above their selfish interests to make a mutually-beneficial deal. This idealist rhetoric ignores the power of the sponsoring agency to convene the deliberation, select the participants and orchestrate the outcome. The public imagined for these deliberations has been modelled on traditional notions of pluralism, recruited on the basis of essentialist identities to achieve a market-research notion of demographic representation (Barnes et al 2003). This model has largely excluded the voice of interest groups and service user organisations and has eschewed conflict in the pursuit of a consensus, or an unchallenging ‘common sense’ outcome (Mouffe 1993). It is a public sphere in an increasingly privatised space, where the opportunities for deliberation are narrowed and the range of possible outcomes has been preordained in spheres that are not open to participation (Fraser 1992, Laclau & Mouffe 1985). While Ministers have quoted philosophies that promoted the devolution of power to local communities, the actual implementation of participatory democracy as a government project has been somewhat limited and these policies have not been accompanied by any meaningful transfer of power (Newman et al 2004). Strong central control has been maintained over the finances, strategies and standards of public services while the role allotted to democratic participation at a local level has been to implement government policies within a highly prescriptive framework and imposed budgetary limits (Marinetto 2003).

The noticeable failure of participation to bring about fundamental change in who exercises power has sharpened the scepticism of some commentators and renewed criticisms of it as a mechanism of control and a means of legitimating existing power relations (Riseborough 1998, Carr, Sefton-Green & Tissier 2001). Peter Somerville’s maxim that ‘participation without empowerment is therefore a confidence trick performed by the controllers of an activity on participants in that activity’ (Somerville 1998: 234) encourages participation programmes to be scrutinised and graded according to the extent to which they succeed in transferring power. Opportunities for community control or self-management are favoured in an approach initiated by Sherry Arnstein in her highly-charged model of a Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969). Arnstein’s assessment of the power relations of participation was shaped by the Community Action projects in the
USA during the early 1960s. Committed in theory to ‘a democratic ideal of citizen participation’ (Marris & Rein 1974: 219) these projects had witnessed the practice of this ideal as rent strikes, demonstrations and pickets. As Presidential advisor on the later Model Cities Programme, Arnstein witnessed the emergence of a powerful movement for neighbourhood control, inspired by the militant civil rights movement and embracing the tactics of direct collective action (Cary 1970, American Planning Association 2005). Arnstein’s ‘ladder’ identified the structural inequalities and power imbalances that restricted the outcomes of participation and she argued that only a transfer of formal decision-making powers to service users, or ‘citizen power’ could rescue participation from the processes of manipulation, therapy and tokenism (Arnstein 1969: 216). This interpretation was applied by agencies such as the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) and the Priority Estates Project (PEP) to promote tenant management of council estates in England during the 1980s, and won governmental support as part of a strategy to open up local authority housing to forms of competition, a development that, perversely, further reinforced the portrait of participation as a method of social control (Furbey, Wishart & Grayson 1996, Goodlad 2001).

The regulatory aspects of participation – the application of theories of empowerment to support government programmes, the promotion of active citizenship in pursuit of marketisation and the spread of deliberative democracy in collaborative governance – have been highlighted by scholars drawing on applications of Michel Foucault’s (1991) theory of governmentality. Whatever its roots or intentions, participation is presented in Foucauldian theory as a social policy laden with moral and coercive messages, as ‘responsible participation’ (Paddison, Docherty & Goodlad 2008); a strategy in which power has been increasingly concentrated to shape tenants into the role of responsible citizens and consumers (Imrie & Raco 2003). Scholars influenced by Foucault (see Rose 1999, Cruikshank 1999, Dean 1999, Marinetto 2003) interpret participation and empowerment as characteristics of governmental practices that rely on the agency of the governed to govern themselves; as Foucault (1982: 221) explained, ‘to govern like this is to structure the possible field of actions of others.’ In taking up the liberatory possibilities of participation, Kim McKee and Vickie Cooper (2008) argued, tenants operate within legislation, policies, budgets and behavioural criteria set down by government that structure the possibilities of their actions and set a fixed horizon on their achievements.
The application of Foucault’s governmentality to tenant participation challenges its association with a tenants’ movement radicalised by ideas of autonomy and self-determination and produces a more sophisticated understanding of the process of ‘incorporation’. The idea that tenant agency dedicated to a liberatory endeavour has been recuperated by regulatory agencies is predicated on the illusion that tenants enjoy the ability to exist outside power relations, and that as individual agents they have the choice between being ‘in and against the state’, as the London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group (1980) expressed it. This argument relies on the traditional notion of agency as a pre-existing ‘I’, the possessor of a stable identity who acts on an external world and its social context. Foucault’s approach overthrows this convention to imagine ‘identity’ as an effect of power that constitutes the subject through its regulatory practices. In the Foucauldian perspective, there can be no free agents; the subject is produced through the operation of discourse, the productive network of power and knowledge that constitutes society. Discourses mould and shape individuals by defining the concepts, norms, categories and conventions that describe reality and make it comprehensible. In this manner the agency of the subject is already disciplined by the boundaries of power. ‘Power is always already there,’ as Foucault (1980: 141) said; no one is ever outside it and there are no margins from which it can be safely resisted. The possibilities of agency are sealed within relations of power that construct the subject, and engage its subjectivity to manage its own subjection.

If there is no recourse to an ‘individual’ or a personal ‘identity’ that escapes the net of power it is difficult to understand how agency can operate or how power can be resisted or subverted. Understandably, the theory of governmentality has been a bitter pill to swallow for those engaged in social movement campaigns who champion the possibility of radical political change since it appears to limit the role of agency, banish antagonism and conflict, and deny the possibility of any challenge to power. In the Will to Empower, Barbara Cruikshank (1999) addressed those on the left who organise community struggles and hope to empower the oppressed to fight their enslavement, pointing out their fallacy: social movements cannot escape the corrosive effects of power relations and, for that reason they cannot be conceived as progressive or liberatory. One of the most caustic Foucauldian criticisms of social movement theory has come from Mitchell Dean (1999:42), who dismissed ideas that politics should be regarded
as a matter of struggle between social groups, dubbing these ‘the meta\nhistories of promise’ and arguing instead that government operated through the liberties of those who mistakenly believed themselves to be affecting change.

The static, even deterministic framework imagined in some Foucauldian interpretations has been subject to criticism (Butler 2004b), and recent analysts have coined an approach known as ‘realist governmentality’ (McKee 2009a) to explain the ability of subjects to resist the constitutive command of governmental strategies. They point out that not all governmental discourses succeed in establishing themselves as the ‘common sense’ of popular perception and that the targets of these strategies sometimes appear to be capable of preserving alternative and combative systems of belief. As illustration, John Clarke and co-authors (2007) evidenced the failure of New Labour strategies promoting consumerist behaviour to change the way service users felt about the welfare state, while Kim McKee (2010) examined the refusal of tenants to accept government messages around housing stock transfer. This resurgence in interest in the resistance of subjects against constitutive discourses provides a roadmap for integrating social movement theory into a Foucauldian framework but ‘realist governmentality’ appears to lack a theoretical model to understand how subjects can take the path of resistance. While Foucault theorised resistance as an integral accompaniment to the application of power, contending that power relations were engaged in a ‘permanent provocation’ with resistance (1982: 225), he provided no clear framework for conceptualising its possibility. This absence leads realist governmentality theorists to return, perhaps unintentionally, to a belief in self-agency and free will, and to jettison Foucault’s theories of the formation of the subject in favour of an unbounded voluntarism (see for example Clarke 2004: 9 or McKee 2009a: 479). Without a coherent theory of resistance that develops rather than weakens Foucault’s concept of subjectification, it has been difficult for governmentality theorists to understand collective action or any mobilisation other than passive resistance.

Governmentality theory requires a theorisation of power that is capable of explaining why some discourses acquire more constitutive effect than others, and a theory of subjectification that acknowledges the ability of collective subjects to resist from inside constitutive power. Queer theorist and feminist philosopher, Judith Butler has been at the forefront in this field and her influential work, drawing on Michel Foucault’s theories of the subject and power, Louis
Althusser’s understanding of ideology, Nietzsche’s denial of the subject’s agency, and the insights of post-colonial theory, has developed a role for agency while maintaining an understanding of the social construction of the subject. Butler argues that to be constituted by power is not to be determined by it and that agency is located in the process through which the subject is constructed and through which identities are reproduced. Although she developed her theories in gender studies, Judith Butler has more recently worked with Ernesto Laclau to contribute to the theory of hegemony initially set out by Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their 1985 work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (Butler 2000, Butler & Laclau 2004). This collaboration has created a strong theoretical matrix through which to analyse both the constitutive effect of discourse and the potential of subjects to resist. In particular Butler has focused on the flawed projects of social movements, what she calls ‘domesticated’ social movements. In the gay movement’s demand for same-sex marriage, and in the pro-censorship campaigns of anti-pornography feminists, she sees the tensions inherent in social movements that are situated inside power, whose members are conditioned by the weight of dominant power relations and are deprived of all but the most expedient agency by the regulatory frame that constructs and surrounds them. Butler’s concern stems from an optimism grounded in a specific theory of resistance from within power and provides a subtle and complex approach that incorporates contentious politics with an appreciation of the regulatory effects of discourse. Butler’s work has consequently been applied far beyond the world of gender studies (see Gregson & Rose 2000, Davies 2006), and it has been argued that her understandings of identity and subversion could provide an insightful analytical tool for housing research (Gabriel & Jacobs 2008, Bradley 2010).

Judith Butler’s theories of hegemony (2000), interpellation and performativity (1993) provide an interpretive tool with which to recalibrate the Foucauldian understanding of the power relations at work in tenant participation. Instead of the traditional binary of liberty and oppression, and against the framework of regulatory determinism, a theoretical analysis based on the work of Judith Butler enables tenant participation to be envisaged as a dynamic articulation of power in which tenant ‘voice’ is produced, contested and enabled to resist both meaning and outcomes. An approach drawing on Butler is therefore admirably suited to an analysis of the role played by the tenants’ movement in participation. It allows participation to be viewed as a regulatory discourse and
provides a focus on the role of tenants in constructing that discourse through collective action. The two faces of ‘voice’, as quasi-market force or as political struggle, become, in Butler’s thesis, an outcome of the production and contention of identities. By focusing on Butler’s work on identity construction and the reiteration in practical action of those identities, a tenants’ movement can be discerned that is constructed and regulated through participation and that by ‘doing’ participation subverts it. The following section sets out this theoretical framework in more detail.

Hegemony and resistance

The concept of hegemony provides a dynamic understanding of social structure by underlining the contingent and precarious grasp of power relations. It provides what Butler called ‘the ideal of a possibility’ (2000: 162) and undercuts the sense of fatality associated with other interpretations of power.

‘Distinct from a view that casts the operation of power in the political field exclusively in terms of discrete blocs which vie with one another for control of policy questions, hegemony emphasises the ways in which power operates to form our everyday understanding of social relations, and to orchestrate the ways in which we consent to (and reproduce) those tacit and covert relations of power.’ Judith Butler (2000: 13-14)

Hegemony is an exclusionary discourse in the service of a political goal (Butler 1993: 4). It is an attempt by a social group to portray its ambitions in universal terms and to recruit, or ‘articulate’, other groups to its camp by developing a ‘chain of equivalence’ around an identity, or set of meanings that transcend its own particular goals (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 176). David Howarth and Yannis Stavrakakis (2000) explain this succinctly: ‘A political project will attempt to weave together different strands of discourse in an effort to dominate or organise a field of meaning so as to fix the identities of objects and practices in a particular way.’ This formation is cemented through what Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985: 112) called ‘nodal points’, the key signifiers that allow diverse interests to be articulated into a relation of equivalence that endows a particular discourse with a universal significance through which all antagonisms
are neutralised. The emerging hegemonic discourse offers itself as a surface in which a range of social groups can see reflected their own aims, values and interests, and its specific content, originating in the ambitions of the hegemonic group, takes on the universal status of ‘common sense’. The dominant discourse constructed in this manner works through already normalised social practices to set limits on what is thinkable and what is legitimate, and when enshrined in the discourse of authoritative institutions, it acts to regularise behaviour and makes it difficult to postulate any different framework.

As an operation of power, hegemony is a regulatory process that attributes identity. By ‘articulating’ different social groups into a new relation it modifies their identity; it establishes new meanings and norms, and constitutes subjects through a process of exclusion, so that in defining normality, it creates and outlaws the abnormal, and for every identity that is attributed there are those that are repudiated as illegitimate, irrational and finally, incoherent (Smith 1998). Hegemony, then, has what Butler (1993: 3) calls a ‘constitutive outside’ and the shadows of its excluded identities are a constant reminder of the possibilities that have been foreclosed to impose order, and a constant threat of the return of antagonism. The imposition of identity through hegemonic projects never completely encloses its subjects and allows the possibility that it can be redefined through new articulations that express the antagonisms excluded in its construction. As Laclau (2007: 44) argued: ‘The process of identification will be always unstable and penetrated by a constitutive ambiguity’. Identity is never fully sealed; it is incapable of being fixed permanently to one discourse without challenge (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 113). In order to maintain its grip then, hegemony must be constantly re-made but its reinstatement can in no sense be determined in advance; it is therefore a relation of power that is constantly threatened; subject to new articulations and the return of excluded antagonisms.

Theorisations of hegemony have been applied to the major changes that have taken place since the mid-1970s in the organisation of welfare in Britain and offer a sophisticated framework through which to examine the development of participation and its significance in the restructuring of social housing. Stuart Hall (1988) used the concept to analyse the gradual dominance attained over social policy by Thatcherism as a package of maxims and common sense views backed by juridical power and regulatory injunctions. He argued that some ideas became unthinkable in the face of the ubiquitous assertions of neo-liberalism
and, importantly, identified how this hegemonic formation attained its success by harnessing to its project popular discontent with existing welfare services. This point was taken up by Jacob Torfing (1999) who described how the key themes and concepts or ‘nodal points’ of the welfare state became the targets of competing social forces and were redefined to build up the hegemonic edifice of what Peter Malpass (2005: 167) has called the ‘new social settlement’. Participation became one of these battlefields as the identities of welfare users as citizens, consumers, or tenants were contested, and challenges to the organisation of housing services, and the wider governance of the welfare state were channelled into a transformative project. Fiona Williams (1994) has pointed to the role of social movements in bringing down the post-war welfare settlement and argued that the transformation of the welfare state was the result of a complex set of political relations and popular struggle. The hegemonic formation associated with neo-liberal thought articulated a diverse range of criticisms of the social democratic model of public services by providing a language through which these assertions of identity could be made. Although not directly citing Laclau and Mouffe’s theorisation of hegemony, John Clarke et al (2007: 35) maintained that governmental strategy towards welfare services was the outcome of ‘an active process in which positions are negotiated, displaced, subordinated and co-opted’. A dominant social narrative, in which the discourse of consumer choice acts as a proxy for the marketisation or privatisation of welfare services, and where citizenship and consumerism are harnessed uneasily in tandem, was constructed by recruiting multiple voices, with radically different intentions, into a regulatory project that accrued into new sedimented norms.

Judith Butler adds considerably to the definition of hegemony formulated in Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) Hegemony and Socialist Strategy by theorising this regulatory discourse as embodied in the subject, and expressed through day-to-day social practice and she contributes two new dimensions that are particularly useful for applying the concept to tenant participation. The first is an understanding of how identities are attributed to individuals and groups as they are articulated into hegemonic formations. Butler explains the process by which subjects are constituted and how identities are constructed using Louis Althusser’s concept of ‘interpellation’. Althusser ([1971] 2001: 118) describes how a man walking away is hailed by a policeman as ‘Hey you there!’ and how the man turns, recognising himself in the call. In obeying it he is both given a
social identity and called to order as a subject, and Althusser explains this in his conversational style: 'if it interpellates them in such a way that the subject responds “Yes it really is me!”, if it obtains from them the recognition that they really do occupy the place it designates for them as theirs in the world, a fixed residence: “It really is me, I am here, a worker, a boss or a soldier!”’ (1971: 118).

As Judith Butler puts it: ‘in its pursuit of social recognition and social identity, the subject is engaged in a willing embrace of the law’ (1993: 244). This identificatory command offers subjects the benefits of belonging and awards them agency, at the same time as it embeds them in a system of regulation. It is a ‘reprimand’ that produces an obedient subject yet is also a welcome recognition granting social acceptance that the subject willingly embraces (Butler 1993: 121). Social or personal identity, then, is constructed in an act of power that conceals itself in the experience of recognition so that the subject appears to be the agent of her own existence rather than the recipient of an interpellative ‘call to order’ (Butler 1990). Butler understands the homogeneity of the subject to be an illusion; its identity is an articulated set of elements that are constitutionally unstable and that rely on consistent repetition to maintain their naming power. Names, however, can be resisted and renegotiated and the dislocated subject finds its capability for agency in this necessity for repetition (Butler 2004a: 341; Laclau 1990: 44). Identity is always contingent at both the personal and political levels and none can completely enclose or fully determine the subject.

Judith Butler’s theory of performativity denotes this failure of hegemonic power to impose identity as a permanent injunction on the subject; instead identity must be constantly renewed and performed in daily life through ‘a regularised and constrained repetition of norms’ (Butler 1993: 95). To construct this idea of the performativé, Butler drew on the concerns of linguist John L. Austin (1976) with the citational property of language to enact what it names and Jacques Derrida’s (1988) observation that this action applies an iterable formula or code. Butler concludes that the performativé is the constitutive or productive power of discourse and in ‘doing’ their identity in everyday activity subjects cite the norms and regulations of hegemonic power to reproduce their subjection through their own agency. However, the iteration of this identity may not produce an exact copy each time; instead it has the potential to enact a rediscovery of the possibilities that were excluded in its construction; by performing identity the subject may change it. The way in which power relations are transformed is
through their daily reiteration (Butler 2000: 14). Performativity therefore affirms the potential of the subject to subvert and challenge power relations from within an understanding of power as a constitutive, productive force. It gives the concept of hegemony an embodiment in everyday identificatory practices; hegemony is lived and identity is something that subjects ‘do’ and re-do in ways that articulate new meanings in the hegemonic formation. This is what Butler (1993: 237) referred to as ‘working the weakness in the norm’, a subversive practice that is not the same as voluntarism in that it is constituted by regulatory power but is not reducible to it.

Judith Butler questions the ontological intuitions through which identity is traditionally understood and as an application of her work can appear somewhat counter-intuitive, it is useful to explore in more detail her understanding of notions of the self. Instead of a sovereign subject free to construct a sense of self and negotiate a social identity, Butler describes a subject brought into existence by the power of discourse and theorises an identity that is constituted through regulation. She argues (Butler 1990: 25): ‘identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results.’ In other words, identification is an effect of discourse, and what we call identity is the sum of its appearances. Identity is done, and must be constantly re-done within a regulatory framework that seeks to define its outcome. Butler denies agency as an attribute of the self, as something intrinsic to personhood, and understands it instead as a function of discourse where it operates as the gap between intention and outcome. It is to be found at the point at which the rule-governed practices of identification are renewed and reiterated; it exists in that moment of reiteration, in the possibility that what is, may not be again. Butler’s concept of identification shares some similarities with the social constructionist interpretations that dominate social psychology and sociological literature where notions of the self are believed to be the outcome of interaction with others (see for example Tajfel 1981 or Stryker 2000). These scholars agree that subjects may have a number of identities, depending on their social relations, and that these are structured hierarchically, that different identifications may become salient in different circumstances, and that subjects may alternate between identifications according to their need to belong to a group or differentiate themselves from it. What Butler adds to these theories of social identity is a conception of power; where social psychology argues that: ‘identities are self-cognitions tied to roles and thus to positions in organised social relations’
(Stryker 2000: 28), Butler adds the element of compulsion: that identifications are constructed through interpellation, through the exercise of power in a programme of subjection and regulation.

‘There is no “I” who stands behind discourse and executes its volition or will through discourse. On the contrary, the “I” only comes into being through being called, named, interpellated’ (Butler 1993: 225).

While Butler agrees that interpellations constitute a multiple subject with a range of constructed identities, she also argues that these identifications are the result of discourses that often appear to ‘nest’ together and amplify each other’s effects (Butler 1993: 116). The subject may have multiple identifications but in their intersectionality (Crenshaw 1994), these serve to compound the process of subjection, rather than providing release from it. Where the Foucauldian scholar Nikolas Rose (2000) locates resistance in the conflicting effects of overlapping identifications that enable subjects to negotiate their own identity, Butler determinedly shuns this recourse to essentialism or voluntarism and contends that dominant discourses reinforce each other, and that gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and class construct a regime of regulation that attains near universal status.

Judith Butler’s theory has been criticised as too abstract, and for lacking specificity in how subversive practice can be achieved (McNay 1999); to many on the left her ‘deeply antihumanist’ philosophy is anathema (Fraser 1995b: 67); it runs counter to intuition and challenges often unquestioned assumptions about identity and agency. As a tool of inquiry, however, it points to an interrogation of the identificatory discourses of marginal and excluded groups and has particular relevance to social movements. The agency allotted to the subject in the space of the performative is imagined by Butler as an act of resistance through the invocation of a threatened identity and, in this, she implies a connection to the collective identity theories of social movement studies. The key theorist of this concept, Alberto Melucci (1989: 35) argued that the development of collective identity is the prerequisite for collective action in social movements, and defined it as a group process of negotiation and relationship construction around the identification of goals, grievances and plans for contentious action. Butler problematises the concept of collective identity by positioning it within a sophisticated understanding of power in which the resistance actions of social
movements are often fragmentary and futile and their nature as movements is open to contest. She argues that the resistance of social movements can manifest itself as an attempt to repudiate one identity in order to grasp at another, so reconsolidating hegemonic power by reiterating its exclusions. Butler is particularly aware of how social movements can be ‘domesticated’ through regulation and paradoxically how new possibilities for change emerge from their collaboration with power (Butler 2000: 150).

Judith Butler’s work then supplies a robust tool with which to interrogate the role of the contemporary tenants’ movement; to understand how it may be constituted as a domesticated movement as an outcome of participation, but also to identify how participation may enable the tenants’ movement to achieve changes in power relations that would not otherwise be available to it. Butler’s thesis indicates that participation should be understood as an identificatory project that seeks to construct the identity of tenants and that this project also provides opportunities for excluded identities to be reclaimed. In pursuing this direction of analysis, the identifications of a tenants’ movement become the focus of study. The next chapter investigates the origins of the tenants’ movement as a subject of academic discourse and sets out a framework that enables its identity constructions to be explored.

This chapter has identified the immersion of the contemporary tenants’ movement in the daily reiteration of the practices of tenant participation as an obstacle to an assessment of its aims, organisation and achievements. The power relations inherent in tenant participation policy need to be unpicked before the direction of the tenant’s movement can be studied and assayed. Interpretations of power in housing participation cluster around rival theories: understood as either a zero-sum relationship of domination and subjection or a non zero-sum game of encounters and unexpected influences. These conceptions of power align with the twin meanings of ‘voice’, as a market relationship or a process of social change, in which tenants are cast either as individual consumers or members of a collective seeking empowerment and control. In both perspectives, the tenant’s movement stands as an external agent with a problematic relationship to a social practice in which regulatory discourses abound. Michel Foucault’s thesis of governmentality cuts the traditional linkage between social movements and social change to re-imagine participation as a process of power through which tenants become subjects.
This new direction is advanced by Judith Butler’s radical constructivist work in feminist and queer theory and in particular her contribution to Laclau and Mouffe’s theorisation of hegemony, where Butler avoids the pitfalls of Foucauldian theory to draw attention to the possibilities of resistance within theories of subjectification. A framework grounded in Butler’s work on hegemony, interpellation and performativity enables the problem of the tenant’s movement in participation to be recast. Instead of a social movement that asserts its identity against, or through, the practices of participation, the tenants’ movement is seen as the outcome of participation interpreted as an identificatory project. The construction and contestation of identity in the tenant’s movement is the theme developed in the next chapter.
Chapter 3

Identifying the Tenants’ Movement

A tenants’ movement exists only to the extent that theorisations of common interest among tenants can be supported. This interest has traditionally been seen as objective and material. The collective mobilisation of public housing tenants has been depicted as an inevitable outcome of the objective interests pertaining to class position or housing consumption sector. In the urban studies literature of the 1970s and 1980s, Marxist and Weberian theories were applied to the situation of social housing tenants to contend that they possessed common interests rooted in their class relation or in their position as housing consumers, which engendered political conflict. Since the mid-1970s the belief that tenants share common interests has become integral to a project to re-commodify the regulated housing market, and essential to the overall restructuring of the welfare state. The concept of consumer interests envisages a divided tenant body with each member pursuing individual goals, but has been recruited to portray the tenants’ movement as an interest group in the housing market, a notion recently applied in the development of a short-lived National Tenants Voice (House of Lords Bill 2008/09).

These competing perceptions of interest have constituted an ambiguous and multi-faceted discourse through which identifications of the tenants’ movement can be asserted and disputed. This chapter assesses the concepts, theories, local studies and empirical research that have marked the itinerary of the tenants’ movement through the work of the housing academy to provide an analysis of the movement as it emerges in its latest definition. It critically examines the origins of the concept of interest in housing, beginning with the association of tenants’ interest with theories of class struggle, sectoral divides and a history of collective action. It shows how a narrative of struggle posited unproblematic causations between economic interest, consciousness and mobilisation and constructed an action image of the tenants’ movement, a conceptualisation that proved unable to survive the subsequent fragmentation of the council housing sector. It then reviews the concept of a tenant consumer interest as it emerges in the restructuring of social housing and in the
establishment of the short-lived National Tenants Voice to argue in favour of an understanding of interests as the product of negotiation, deliberation and the construction of shared frames of meaning. The chapter concludes that the interests expressed in the tenants’ movement can best be understood through the social movement theory of collective identity as the outcome of processes of identity construction by tenants within the dominant identificatory practices of a restructured welfare state.

Collective action and the tenant interest

The history of the tenants’ movement has never been a value-neutral narrative in which ‘what really happened’ is uncovered and retold. Those who search for evidence of the tenants’ movement must attempt to reconstruct a consciousness that has left few traces in the text. The elite narratives of English housing policy have seldom granted tenants a voice; instead the tenants’ movement has been hidden from history, in Sheila Rowbotham’s memorable phrase; rarely able to represent itself, or to articulate itself as a subject. It has expressed itself in the ephemera of leaflets and posters and in a handful of policy documents, but has left little record in its own words (Lowe 1986, Hague 1990, Grayson 1997). To fill this vacuum, urban studies and community action theorists constructed an alternative narrative of insurgency and resistance for the tenants’ movement, but in their interventionist practice they seldom reflected on the difficulties of speaking for a subject that is voiceless or contemplated the unpalatable thought that a place for tenants in the history books might be impossible to reclaim. Despite the warning of the post-colonialist theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak against a broader application of the concept of the subaltern (Spivak 1988b), it is instructive to draw comparisons between the work of the Subaltern Studies Group of Indian historiographers and the treatment of the tenants’ movement in English urban studies and community action literature, and to apply Spivak’s rigorous criticism of the former to the latter. Addressing the post-colonial historians who have similarly reconstructed an insurgency from texts that fail to record its existence, Spivak (1987, 1996) has counselled vigilance, that in their desire to retrieve a historical actor they do not find themselves complicit in the misrepresentations of the elite history they seek to rectify. In her early essay Can the Subaltern Speak (1988a: 283), Spivak appeared to disown the project to locate agency in ‘the silent, silenced centre’ that is the gendered subaltern.
While the theorists of the tenants’ movement might not have encountered such silence when they began to reconstruct their subaltern histories, it seems, with the benefit of Spivak’s hindsight, that the voices they listened to may have been chiefly their own.

The identification of tenants’ organisations with class interests and class struggle is rooted historically in a narrative of tenant agitation over rents, and labour movement campaigns for the development of publicly subsidised housing prior to, and during, the First World War. The Social Democratic Federation, the Workmen’s National Housing Council, British Socialist Party, Independent Labour Party, Trades Councils and the Labour Party were all instrumental in the organisation of Tenants’ Defence Leagues, rent strike committees and tenants associations from the 1880s into the early years of the 20th Century, in the orchestration of a series of rent strikes against landlord associations and in the development of a political campaign for public housing (Ginsburg 1979, Englander 1983, Grayson 1997). There have been some attempts to dispute the class nature of these early rent strikes, and to underline the limited nature of the demand for public housing they championed (Castells 1983, Melling 1983, Bradley 1997), but this tide of militant tenant action, culminating in the Clydeside rent strike of 1915 and the imposition of rent controls on the private rented sector has been persuasively portrayed as ‘class struggle over reproduction and social welfare issues’ (Damer 2000: 94), and credited with promoting the idea of universal public housing.

It is the depiction of tenant collective action in the 1960s and 1970s as class struggle that is more problematic, based as it is on tenant campaigns against the Housing Finance Act in 1972 and agitation against rent increases in the previous decade (see Hampton 1970, Burn 1972, Moorhouse, Wilson & Chamberlain 1972, Sklair 1975, Kay, Mayo & Thompson 1977, Baldock 1982, Lowe 1986). While these tenant protests coincided with an upsurge in labour and trade union militancy triggered by reductions in public spending and the imposition of wage controls (Hague 1990), they were also part of a wave of community mobilisations around the organisation of public services that directed attention to the welfare state as an area where ‘the social relations not only of class, but of gender and “race” – not to mention age, disability and sexuality – are most apparent’ (Williams 1994: 64). For Hilary Wainwright (1979: 4) tenants were part of a heterogeneous wish-list of grass-roots upheaval: ‘The women’s
movement, solidarity movements with international struggles, many shop stewards' combines or local action committees, the anti-fascist movement, theatre groups, alternative newspapers, militant tenants, squatters and community groups’. The insertion of tenants into this frail alliance was the result of the practical intervention in housing struggles by community workers, socialist campaigners and socialist feminists like Wainwright whose transference of anti-capitalist goals onto community protests helped to construct the image of a radical tenants’ movement and provided the unifying narrative for a grass-roots network of local campaigns.

This process of neighbourhood action was associated inspirationally with the Community Development Projects, a Home Office funded programme launched in 1968, that deployed a network of community workers to tackle the social problems of neighbourhoods who quickly became guided by a class analysis that attributed these problems to structural processes of inequality and oppression rooted in capitalist society as a whole (Loney 1983). Housing provided the focus for much of the community action that developed from these projects, beginning in the inner city neighbourhoods under threat of demolition and urban renewal and moving in the early 1970s onto the council estates where tenants were organising against rising rents, insensitive housing management and structurally defective homes that were expensive to heat and dripping with damp (Fleetwood & Lambert 1982). Publicised in *Community Action* journal by dissident urban planners, and encouraged by academic texts aimed at the newly minted British Association of Social Work and Association of Community Workers (Baldock 1977), a series of militant campaigns followed, erupting in marches, pickets and occupations typified by the tactics applied by the South Wales Association of Tenants who, assisted by three community workers from a housing resource centre, chained themselves to Town Hall railings, occupied a Council Chamber, disrupting the Council meeting, demonstrated on the steps of the Welsh Office and carried a Wendy House in procession through the streets in their campaign to get adequate heating for their council homes (Lees & Mayo 1984). In council housing protests, radical community workers thought they had found the class base for a new kind of political movement that would straddle socialist theory and the practice of community action. As Mike Fleetwood and John Lambert (1982: 54) reflected: ‘It became feasible to conceive of a broad tenants’ movement using a socialist
strategy, linked to a form of local organising concerned with short-term objectives to remedy local grievances’.

While in practical terms this attempted mobilisation often disappointed the hopes of the community project teams (Lambert 1981), the framework for their radical practice was provided by Marxist theories of the State, and by the classification of tenant struggles by Simon Clarke and Norman Ginsburg (1975: 4) as ‘objectively, a struggle between capital and labour over the provision of housing’. Ginsburg contended that the development of public housing served the interests of capitalism as much as it provided improvements in living standards for the working class and he characterised council housing’s bureaucratic management processes as essential functions of capitalist welfare, serving to ration benefits and services, contain opposition and divisively obscure structural contradictions by locating social problems in individual failings (Ginsburg 1979). This thesis had been developed earlier by Paul Corrigan and Peter Leonard (1978) who characterised social housing, along with other welfare services, as mechanisms for maintaining a capitalist regime in the face of class struggle, and who positioned tenants’ campaigns and neighbourhood struggles as a vehicle for uncovering the economic and social inequalities obscured by the welfare state. This attribution to the tenants’ movement of transformatory potential was inspired by Manuel Castells (1976, 1977) model of urban social movements and his analysis of the organisation of the collective means of consumption. Influenced in his earlier work by the Marxist theorist Louis Althusser, Castells interpreted the development of social housing, along with health care, education and public transport, as a response by the State to the need to provide the capitalist economy with an adequate labour force. This, he argued, led to the development of a new forum of class struggle in the cities where demands for improvements in public services threatened the authority of the State and the capitalist mode of production it served. Just as industrial production had enabled the collective organisation of a labour movement, so the mass provision of public services within the infrastructure of cities created the possibility of organised opposition to the State from a new front. Castells (1978: 41) identified the tenants movement with this new arena of class struggle, and community action as the domestic front of class conflict, claiming: ‘these demands are expressed on the one hand through the union movement organised at the place of production, and on the other hand, by new means of mass organisation which have gradually constituted a complete network of movements in the sphere of
collective consumption, from associations of tenants, to committees of transport users’.

In the characterisation of housing struggles as a working class movement to control the organisation and delivery of public services, tenants were attributed a set of material interests they could mobilise around: the interests of the working class opposed to those of the capitalist class (Bolger et al 1981). The radical community workers who sought to address these interests were following a tradition established by socialist groups who had been attempting to orchestrate tenant collective action in the public and private rented sectors since the development of the first council estates. The Communist Party most famously co-ordinated rent strikes in the East End of London in the 1930s, where they linked tenant collective action to the fight against fascism (Piratin 1948, Srebrnik 1995, Glynn 2005), helped launch the National Association of Tenants and Residents in 1948, the countywide federation that continued rather inactively into the 1970s, and were instrumental, rather controversially, in a rent strike in the late 1960s in Sheffield (Hampton 1970). The International Socialists and other Left-wing groups supported the 1972 tenant rent strikes while libertarian and anarchist groups organised their own inner city housing protests and squatting campaigns.

Pursuing this tradition, community action literature celebrated the sporadic rent strikes and incidents of tenant direct action as examples of working-class resistance while the everyday concern of tenants’ associations with local issues such as repairs, environmental matters, clearance and re-housing and the complexities of their collaboration with local authorities in participation schemes were denigrated as unsatisfactorily lacking in political awareness (Smith 1978). Manuel Castells (1976: 155) had laid the ground rules for this hierarchical structuring of tenant action according to its militancy with his concept of the urban social movement that ‘tends objectively towards the structural transformation of the urban system’ and his demotion of movements that failed to meet this revolutionary ideal into the categories of ‘protest’, where their actions led to small-scale reforms of the social system, or ‘participation’ where their efforts merely helped the State to exert social control. In the literature of community action, community workers were urged to be selective about the tenants associations they supported, and to prioritise only those who were prepared to raise socialist demands about their housing conditions (Corkey &
Craig 1978). Many community workers persisted in the belief that neighbourhood struggles were secondary to the ‘real class struggle’ of trade unions and industrial conflict, and constantly urged tenants to construct alliances with the labour movement (Blagg & Derricourt 1982: 18), attempting to replicate the structure of the militant shop stewards committees on housing estates and imposing a trade union model on tenant organisations (Foster 1975). The privileging of direct action over negotiation influenced the scholarly narrative of tenant organising and particularly coloured subsequent academic treatment of the development of tenant participation policy. It found expression in Stuart Lowe’s (1986: 85) disputed categorisation of tenants associations into two radically opposed groupings, one a ‘politically potent’ type of tenants organisation that pursued a tactic of militant direct action, and the second, the ‘established’ tenants association that occupied itself with leisure and social activities, and served unwittingly as a buffer against urban protest. In Lowe’s account, the countrywide mobilisation against the 1972 Housing Finance Act was the final act of radicalism of the tenants’ movement and was followed by a decline in militancy, corresponding with the rise of tenant participation in social housing. The development of tenant participation was regarded with ambivalence in community work literature (Mayo 1972, Derricourt 1973, Cockburn 1977a, Smith 1978) and seen by Liz Cairncross and colleagues (1997) as a consequence of a decline in the fortunes of the tenants’ movement’s in the failure of the 1972 rent strikes. Lowe’s division of tenant collective action according to its militancy is still influential today and can be traced to the academic interest in the campaigns of Defend Council Housing and the struggles against the transfer of council housing (Daly et al 2005, Ginsburg 2005, Mooney & Poole 2005, McCormack 2008, Watt 2008). While these accounts of resistance to the marketisation of social housing are valuable – and tenants have voted against stock transfer in almost 25 per cent of ballots – they stand in contrast to the lack of any academic study of the more nuanced operations of the tenants’ movement itself. Many tenants are involved in Defend Council Housing and work alongside the Socialist Workers Party, trade unionists and Labour MPs in the campaign group, but the tenants’ movement has not expressed opposition to stock transfer in principle, since many of its members are housing association tenants, and, perhaps more pertinently because Defend Council Housing champions a form of bureaucratic delivery that the tenants’ movement has set out to change through its involvement in tenant participation from the early 1970s (compare Ginsburg 1979 to Ginsburg 2005).
The housing campaigns that radical community workers hoped would ‘generalise the frustrations and the class position of local tenants and residents in order to build a wider political campaign’ (Corkey & Craig 1978: 58) turned out to be localised and defensive actions with limited objectives, that took place, with some notable exceptions, in isolation from the working-class movement. John Cowley and the radical community workers who were his co-authors (Cowley et al 1977), imagined that the tenants’ campaign against the Housing Finance Act and the trade union revolt against the Industrial Relations Act in the early 1970s displayed the unity of the Left against the Heath government, but the labour movement largely failed to support the last ditch attempt by the nation’s council tenants to protect the principle of general needs public housing (Baldock 1982). Social housing tenants had been relegated to a backwater of social policy that the trade unions, in particular, and labour movement more generally, largely ignored. Housing issues appeared to have been the subject of a compromise between capital and labour that had resulted in a housing system that prioritised owner-occupation (Dickens et al 1985), and even Paul Corrigan and Peter Leonard (1978: 150) admitted: ‘community groups have arisen precisely because of the failure of working class parties to establish themselves in this area’.

As Stephen Edgell and Vic Duke (1991) noted, the developing processes of welfare state restructuring made class appear an increasingly blunt instrument for understanding the dynamic of social change. Radical community workers continued to influence tenant campaigns and organisations, and links between tenants’ organisations and the labour movement were discernable in the North of England up until the early 1990s (Grayson 2010), but the class analysis of tenants’ and community struggles became subject to criticism from its own proponents (Clarke & Ginsburg 1975), and was replaced in urban studies literature by a new theoretical strand that linked collective action to divisions in consumption and replaced the concept of class-consciousness with a sectoral interest that generated political action. In developing the theory of sectoral consumption cleavages, Patrick Dunleavy (1980) and Peter Saunders (1981) reflected the role that housing policy assumed as the test-bed for welfare restructuring strategies: the imposition of market rents or means tested benefits on tenants from the early 1960s, the erosion of support for the mass development of public rented housing that had been apparent since the late
1950s (and that in the mid-1970s translated into cuts in housing subsidy), and the increasing cultural and political shift in favour of home ownership (Ginsburg 1979, Malpass 2005). The theory that consumption cleavages, or sectoral divides, could be identified in the consumption of housing was applied to interpret the fracture opening up in the working class between those with the potential to realise increased value from their ownership of housing and those who remained without property in the social rented sector. Rival motivations around consumption appeared to override class boundaries to establish a new set of interests exemplified in the growth of home ownership among the working class, and the emergence of social stratification based on consumption rather than production.

Sectoral theory constructed a thesis of consumer interests taken from a Weberian framework first applied to the housing market by John Rex and Robert Moore (1967) in their theory of housing classes and the argument that access to housing creates a hierarchical social structure in urban areas. Rex and Moore reasoned that competition for scarce desirable homes had a stratifying effect and that distribution of housing resources through the market and by local authority allocation established a series of housing classes engaged in struggle over their position on the housing ladder. In particular, Rex and Moore identified the subordinate position of ethnic minority and immigrant communities in the housing market as social divisions that crosscut labour market distinctions. In his criticism of this thesis, Peter Saunders (1981: 276) was concerned to stress the ‘real and vital’ nature of housing divisions and the material interests that were specific properties of particular consumption sectors. In the place of Rex and Moore’s seven housing consumption sectors, Saunders proposed instead a structure based on the economic interests deriving from a division between home ownership and renting. Where Patrick Dunleavy (1980) argued that a shared position in housing consumption produced a common ideological alignment, and manifested itself in shared political loyalties or beliefs, Saunders (1981) asserted that consumption cleavages generated material interests that did not simply shape the beliefs and voting patterns of those affected, but motivated their behaviour. While maintaining that housing was consumed individually, in keeping with a Weberian notion of class and interest groups, Saunders applied his structural model to interpret the phenomena of collective action around housing issues and claimed that community housing struggles mobilised around ‘specific sectoral interests defined in relation to the process of
consumption’ (1981: 274). In making this assertion, he assigned to the material interests of council tenants the power to act as a rallying point for political struggle. By applying Weberian theory to a narrative of collective action, Saunders shifted the meaning of the consumer interest from the economic property of a sectoral position to the political foundation of contentious collective action. His differences with Marxist theory centred on the characteristics of these struggles and Saunders argued that collective action in the sphere of consumption was, by definition, always localised and reactive and would not have the transformatory qualities attributed by Marxists to class struggle.

Sectoral theory, then, failed to make a definite break with the Marxist concept of class interest but reinterpreted it to acknowledge the intra-class divisions caused by the breakdown of the welfare state consensus. The connection made by Dunleavy between structural position and ideology referenced the work of Louis Althusser, while in his concern with the analysis of collective action in the sphere of consumption, it could be argued that Saunders was following, however reluctantly, the trajectory of thought taken by Manuel Castells. In its controversial depiction of tenants as agents of class struggle, Castells’ early work (1976, 1977) imagined a working class united across the fields of production and distribution and energised by the forces of collective consumption. As he developed his theory to engage with the growing privatisation of consumption that obscured class boundaries, Castells (1978) was to characterise tenants’ struggles, alongside other community protests, as the evolution of an urban social movement that crossed class lines and represented the growing centrality of consumption interests to social stratification. In the revision of his earlier thesis, Castells (1983) continued to attribute mobilising effects to consumption cleavages and to assert the local neighbourhood as a field of struggle. Attempting to apply Castells’ frameworks to the social housing sector in England, Stuart Lowe (1986) argued for the existence of a working-class social base in council housing that engendered material interests based on class and consumption positions. Lowe theorised that as council tenants were brought together by the restrictive housing management practices of local authorities, and concentrated in defined and distinctive housing estates, they were bound by their shared experience of stigma and conjoined in an overwhelmingly working class culture. This social base established a set of common cultural and economic interests that enabled council housing tenants to mobilise in collective action, a thesis Lowe applied to
his study of protests against the rent rises of the 1972 Housing Finance Act. Even as Lowe was writing, however, the uniformity of council estates was dissolving, and the Right to Buy, brought in by the 1980 Housing Act, had begun to fracture the bonds of tenure, culture and place. The sale of council houses was to radically reduce the size and status of the social housing sector and speed the residualising effect of a housing policy bias that, since the 1930s, had favoured home ownership at the expense of public renting (Ginsburg 1979, Malpass 2005). Rent increases encouraged better-off tenants to exit the sector while the substitution of means-tested rent rebates and then housing benefit payments for the supply side subsidies that had once supported the mass building of council housing confirmed the sector’s role as a welfare safety net for the poorest and most vulnerable, housed in the worst quality homes (Jones & Murie 2006). In a re-assessment of Lowe’s profile of the social base of council housing for the much-changed housing market of the 1990s, Liz Cairncross, David Clapham and Robina Goodlad (1993) evidenced the numerous distinctions in material interests between tenants of different council estates and different property types, and as recipients of different management processes. Presenting a bleak account of a marginalised and fragmented council housing sector, Liz Cairncross and colleagues trounced the notion that tenants comprised an element within the class struggle, dismissed the suggestion that tenants could be identified as a distinct sector within the structuring of collective urban consumption and debunked the contention that tenants shared any material interests or common issues. This research put an end to any proposition that social housing tenants shared a set of common material interests that could trigger collective action. By 2005 half of all council housing had been transferred to registered social landlords or sold, while half of the remaining stock had been removed to the quasi market of arms-length management and the sector had become even more diversified with the development of new shared-ownership and rent to mortgage housing (ODPM 2004, Ginsburg 2005). The concept of material interests seemed to be a feature of a mono-tenure past, while the contemporary housing landscape reflected a more individualistic outlook, and with a presumption against the mobilisation of collective action, the tenant interest could be reconfigured according to the classical liberal view of the consumer.
The consumer voice in social housing

In the programme of welfare state restructuring begun in the mid-1970s, the service user was reborn as a consumer, and the concept of consumer interests was applied as a counterweight to the power of the professional and bureaucratic elites in charge of service delivery (Clarke & Newman 1997, Stoker 2004). The classical liberal view of the consumer as a rational, self-interested individual endowed with free choice became transposed to the organisation and delivery of public services, where the passive recipient of welfare was re-imagined as a demanding and sceptical citizen-consumer with an interest in the choice, quality, and price of public goods and the accountability of those who supply them (Trentmann 2005, Clarke 2007). In the Conservative Governments of the 1980s and 1990s, and the New Labour regime that followed, the consumer interest was pursued by ushering the market forces of supply and demand into public services through a programme of privatisation, and, where no market was possible, by introducing a range of ‘choice and voice’ mechanisms in quasi-markets and opportunities for participation, complaint and redress (House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee 2005).

The notion of a consumer interest to be asserted as a counterweight to the dominance of the producer emerged in Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*. Individual self-interest was seen by Enlightenment thought as the propellant of human behaviour, and the market place as the site for harmonising association. The figure of the rational, discerning consumer appeared first in the primitive guise of *homo economicus*, a being fathered by John Stuart Mill and David Ricardo, and driven by an appreciation of its economic self-interest, evolved into the leading actor of rational choice and public choice theories (Swedberg 2005). Despite the dedication with which these theories were applied to the organisation of public housing in England, and their centrality in the restructuring of welfare services, opportunities to transform social housing tenants into sovereign consumers have been limited. Ed Mayo, Chief Executive of the National Consumer Council, and James Tickell, former Deputy Chief Executive of the National Housing Federation have characterised the tenant as a captive consumer in a service dominated by the interests of producers (Mayo & Tickell 2006). The most recent attempt to express the tenant interest in the identity of the consumer has been through the brief establishment of a National Tenant Voice, a project that reveals unexpected connections between the concepts of
class and consumer, collective and individual interests, and that demonstrates how these supposedly material properties can be moulded and adapted to serve competing claims of identity.

In April 2006 a Tenant Involvement Commission led by the National Housing Federation gave Ed Mayo and James Tickell the opportunity to define the interests of tenants around seven themes of representation, access, choice, safety, information, fairness and redress, and to call on government to fund a national organisation to represent the interests of tenants as effectively as the professional bodies and landlord associations defended the interests of service providers. This call was repeated by the National Consumer Council in December that year when Ruth Kelly, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, announced a review of housing regulation to be led by Professor Martin Cave, and it was one upheld by the Cave Review in its recommendation for the establishment of a new consumer watchdog organisation to voice the interests of social housing tenants. The model for a National Tenants Voice set out in Cave’s report *Every Tenant Matters* (2007) was of a consumer watchdog on the lines of the train passengers’ lobby, Passenger Focus, or the OfCom consumer panel, that could influence the national policy agenda for social housing and collate and research information on landlords’ performance at regional and local authority level. The creation of consumer watchdogs has been a standard feature of the privatisation of regulated public services in Britain, and follows the template of customer advocacy and research originally established in USA by Consumers Research (Rao 1998), and in this country by the Consumers Association in 1956 and the National Consumer Council in 1975 (Hilton 2003).

In calling for a National Tenants Voice to represent tenants as consumers, Mayo and Tickell (2006:10) imagined the tenants’ movement in classical liberal terms as a consumer interest group, or lobby group, aiming to influence policy from a standpoint of self-interest, whose existence presupposed an equality of interests in a pluralist society. The inauguration of a consumer watchdog marked an about-turn from interpretations of a tenants’ movement as a network of autonomous user groups whose collective action stems from a position of powerlessness and exclusion and that seeks to bring about a change in power relations (Barnes 1999). Criticising the effectiveness of the national tenants’ grouping, the Tenants and Residents Organisation of England (Taroe), Mayo
and Tickell noted that it did not enjoy unchallenged acceptance, and referring to a history of competition between tenants’ organisations at national level, argued that the tenants’ movement was fragmentated and unable to uphold the tenant interest against the well-resourced and articulate producers’ lobby represented by the Chartered Institute of Housing, the Local Government Association, and the National Housing Federation itself. In a series of tenant conferences held in the wake of the Cave review, the idea of a National Tenants Voice won wide-scale support from tenants’ organisations but the model to emerge from these workshops was rather different from that of the consumer watchdog imagined by Cave and the National Consumer Council. Tenants pictured a Voice that could be a national trade union for tenants, democratically constituted with regional branches and elected officials, holding statutory powers that might extend into the private rented sector, and with the authority to intervene against landlords and resolve complaints (Bandy, Drew & Sarantis 2007). Responding to proposals for the National Tenants Voice set out in a Tenant Empowerment consultation paper (CLG 2007a), tenants organisations called for the new body to have a formal role in government decision-making on housing policy as a representative and democratic organisation led by tenants. Largely ignoring these responses, the approach taken by Communities and Local Government was to pursue the consumer watchdog model for the Tenants Voice by announcing their wish to see the National Consumer Council host the new body, while still involving tenants in the development process (CLG 2007b).

A National Tenants Voice Project Group was established by Communities and Local Government in February 2008 with representatives from national and regional tenants’ organisations, and the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) sitting alongside the National Consumer Council and the housing trade bodies, with tenants taking the majority of places. At the first working party meeting, the tenant lobby successfully staved off plans to give the National Consumer Council control over the new organisation, leaving the question of the location of the National Tenants Voice in abeyance while the tenant empowerment consultancy TPAS and the national tenants organisation Tenants and Residents Organisations of England (Taroe) lobbied Ministers to exclude the National Consumer Council from further consideration (Morgan 2008). By the time the Project Group issued a consultation paper on its proposals in July 2008, not only had the National Consumer Council been removed from the negotiations, but a shade of antagonism had crept into the imagery of a National
Tenants Voice conceived by the group. In the project group’s proposals (NTV Project Group 2008a: 2) the Voice was to be ‘rooted in the tenants’ movement, with close working links with representative tenants’ organisations’ and, while still imagined as a consumer watchdog with an advocacy and research remit, the new body would help build and strengthen tenants organisations and be guided by a belief ‘that tenants are citizens of equal worth’ (2008a 3). The National Tenants Voice was now to be an independent organisation rather than operating as part of an existing agency, and would have a governance structure that was accountable to tenants, led by tenants, with guaranteed places on its National Council for the national and regional tenants’ organisations.

The final report of the National Tenants Voice Project Group *Citizens of Equal Worth* (2008b: 14) made clear the subtle changes to the way a consumer watchdog role was to be envisaged. The core purpose of the new organisation was ‘to increase the opportunities for social tenants to have a strong collective influence over the policies that affect them’ and it was evident the National Tenants Voice was to be seen as part of a collective movement, strengthening the network of self-organised local and regional tenants organisations and resourcing representative organisations. The model of a National Tenants Voice that found its way into legislation appeared to have been substantially amended by the tenant lobby on the project group. The role of the new organisation was defined in the *Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill* as ‘representing or facilitating the representation of the views and interests of social housing tenants in England’ and it was to be governed by a council drawn in part from the national and regional tenants organisations (House of Lords Bill 2008/09: 25). The Bill proposed what appeared to be a hybrid of consumer watchdog and political organisation, and while it legitimised the representation of the consumer interest in housing policy-making and appeared to signal one more step in the remorseless marketisation of public services, the model of a National Tenants Voice proposed owed more to collective interests, and to a tradition of collective action, than to the classic liberal representations of the individualist consumer.

The launch of the National Tenants Voice in February 2010, with the election of its 50 person Tenant Council, was followed swiftly in July by its abolition in the ‘bonfire of the quangos’ ignited by the Coalition Government (Cameron 2009a). However, the ability of tenants on the National Tenants Voice Project Group to
apply a consumerist discourse to promote ideas of political representation and collective action importantly reflects the ambiguity of the concept of consumer interest in housing policy. A binary distinction between consumerism and citizenship was erected by Liz Cairncross and colleagues (1997) to categorise the different approaches of social landlords to tenant participation in housing services. Consumerist participation was defined as the publication of performance figures, league tables, and the application of market research methodologies like satisfaction surveys and focus groups to assess customer views of service quality, while a citizenship view of tenant participation, in contrast, encouraged collective action, and drew links with democratic involvement and self-management. For Catherine Needham (2003) the consumerist approach corrupts the relationship between the citizen and the State, individualising it and turning it into a transaction. It removes the ability of citizens to collectively shape public services, or to control directly the way they are delivered. The establishment of a National Tenants Voice would seem to fit snugly into a consumerist model of housing. The new watchdog was to have collated performance information from social landlords, monitored tenant satisfaction and reported on standards to consumers allowing them to make rational choices in a self-correcting marketplace. The demand from tenants’ organisations for statutory rights and a democratic and representative lobby group would seem to reflect an opposite approach rooted in the values of citizenship. This unbridgeable chasm asserted between the identities of consumer and citizen mirrors the contention of twin definitions in Hirschman’s ‘voice’, the one a market-like discipline, the other political collective action. Voice has been claimed by Marion Barnes and David Prior (1995) as a force of citizenship, and conscripted in its role as a collective response to public services to signify the lines of political accountability supposedly embedded in representative democracy. Voice has been set in opposition to ‘choice’ or ‘exit’ to reclaim the public sector values of equity and justice from the language of the consumer, and to counter universal need against individual demand (Stewart & Walsh 1992). But the application of consumerism and citizenship as binary opposites in interpretations of voice is not as helpful as it first appears. The use of this dichotomy ignores the considerable similarities between the twin concepts and greatly oversimplifies the actual relationships that shape participation mechanisms in public services. While ‘voice’ for Hirschman was ‘participatory, political action’ (Hirschman & Nelson 1976: 386), and he saw it applied principally as organised protest and exerted bargaining power, he also
anticipated that voice would be applied individually and would become a recognised and institutionalised feature of the market place as it became enshrined by regulatory bodies and embodied in firms and organisations (Hirschman 1970: 42, 43). The effectiveness of voice, therefore, depended on the inventiveness of service users or customers and their ability to apply political action within a market setting; in other words, on their ability to remain political actors in the face of an individualising consumerism. The application of voice is enmeshed in the ambiguous nature of the politics of consumption, the constructions of political action and social participation and the shifting definitions of the consumer and citizen.

Frank Trentmann (2004) argues that the persona of the consumer has provided a flexible identity through which political struggles have been fought since the nineteenth century. Tracing the history of consumer organisation in the labour movement, and the severing of the vision of co-operative consumption from the producer-centred policy that came to dominate socialist thought, Matthew Hilton points to the establishment of the Consumers Association in 1956 and the ambition of its founder, Michael Young, to build a politics of consumption, and to the part played by the National Consumer Council, set up in 1975, to propagate consumerist rhetoric into the realm of decommodified services. ‘Consumerism has been one of the most recurring means by which citizens have moulded their political consciousness and shaped their political organisations’ Hilton (2003: 1) maintains. He argues that the figure of the rational consumer as the keystone of liberal economics was constructed in the face of many other possible consumer identities. ‘Consumers were imagined solely as individuals and never as collectives of interested parties and their role in “shopping” was equated with citizenship, thereby excluding many of the agendas that had inspired and fuelled consumer and citizen groups’ (Hilton 2003: 266). Commenting on the spread of consumerism into public services and its encroachment into realms of citizenship, Frank Trentmann (2004: 380) warns that the debate over the identity of the consumer is far from over, noting that ‘consumer identities have become suffused with questions of civic participation, cultural identities, and social and global justice, as well as with a drive to acquire goods.’

Peter Shapely (2006, 2007) has presented tenants’ struggles in the character of a consumer movement in his study of tenant campaigns over housing conditions on the Hulme estate in Manchester and he argues that the demands of social
housing tenants for a role in the decision-making of public housing organisations paralleled the rise of consumerism in Britain during the 1970s. In his view, tenant organisations contributed through their lobbying at local and national level to the development of a consumer culture in which participation in public services became established as the norm. Jenny Potter (1988), who monitored the political ascent of the consumer movement, also attributed this generative role to the tenants’ movement. Certainly the National Consumer Council assisted in reviving a national tenants’ movement in 1978 around the demand for security of tenure set out in a Tenants Charter (Lowe 1987, Hood & Woods 1994), while the National Tenants Organisation it helped launch championed consumer involvement in housing policy (Oxley 1986). This representation of tenants as a consumer movement clearly echoes the role ascribed to service users by the champions of public choice theory and the advocates of public service reform, and accords with the development of quasi-market relations in social housing. However, the achievement of tenants’ organisations in adapting the aims of a consumer watchdog to the objectives of a collective in the National Tenants Voice Project Group reflects a division in the consumer rights movement that dates back to its inception. The first consumer watchdog organisation established in USA, Consumers Research was riven in two by a dispute over its support for big business. The Consumers Union emerged from the split in 1935 with the explicitly political aim to unite consumers and workers and improve working conditions and living standards through advocacy and collective action (Rao 1998). The consumer watchdog organisation has served a dual role ever since, promoting the model of a rational consumer, respectful of the efforts of business to improve standards and supporting the ideal of a free market, and at the same time championing the anti-corporate ethics of Ralph Nader, the internationally orchestrated boycotts of the products of major corporations and the rise of ethical consumerism (Yiannis & Lang 2006). Consumption has become the popular guise through which public identities are constructed and purchasing decisions are made to create political statements, while shopping has acquired emancipatory connotations, and the rise of ethical consumerism and the application of consumer boycotts have brought the rational and self-regarding consumer into the field of a social movement whose favoured tactic is direct collective action. While consumerism has been applied in social housing, as in other public services, to mould the identity of the welfare service user, participation in the politics of collective consumption has also been applied to resist these identities and, in the debate over the National Tenants
Voice, to construct a contentious political imagery that calls for more democracy and accountability in public services rather than more individual choice (see for example Haywood 2007). The tenants' interest, then, is not the material interest of a consumption sector, and it is not the objective interest of a class position; instead it is the immaterial, mercurial interest that is established in the construction of an identity (Trentmann 2005), and may best be analysed through the concept of ‘identity work’ originating in social movement theory.

**Tenants and social movements**

Tenant collective action can be seen as one strand in a proliferation of social movements that arose in the 1960s and 1970s characterised by campaigns of service users against the bureaucracy of the welfare state. These movements shared a common emphasis on participatory involvement and the demand for more control over the everyday environment and were locally based and organised around personal experience (Segal 1979, Lees & Mayo 1984). Awarded an illusory, and often unwelcome, unity through the category class struggle, by the 1990s they had become an increasingly scattered collection of organisations, protests, and lifestyle groupings whose diversity challenged any notion of structural interests (Williams 1994, Carr 2007).

Women have always played a leading role in the tenants’ movement. Peter Baldock (1982: 123) maintained that the movement was in its origins ‘a movement of women’ and this enabled it to develop new ways of mobilising on the housing estates that, in its pursuit of participatory democracy, anticipated the new organisational forms of the women’s and students movements. Cynthia Cockburn (1977b) argued that community action was one element of women’s liberation and suggested that the dominant role of women in tenant struggles was the factor that would forge the necessary class links between housing, health and industrial conflict. But as the women’s movement gathered momentum, housing struggles did not become a feminist issue; instead, women active in the community were presented with a new vista of their separate interests (Smith 1993). New opportunities opened for disabled activists and gay and lesbian campaigners, while fresh political agendas emerged in the peace and environmentalist movements. The particularist goals of these divergent
campaigns underlined the failure of a universal discourse of interests to suitably characterise community and welfare service user movements in England and allowed them to be identified with what Jürgen Habermas (1981) and others called the 'new social movements'; an emerging force that appeared to fragment the traditional distinctions of social class and material interest (Hewitt 1996).

The social struggles that arose with such vivacity in the late 1960s were interpreted as ‘new’ because they seemed to mark a departure from the class-based approach of the labour movement and could not be interpreted through the Marxist prism of material interest. In attempting to classify the new social movements, Alain Touraine (1985) identified their defining characteristic as their concern for cultural issues, their engagement with transforming values and social norms. Movements in the United States and Europe appeared to be championing or rebelling against definitions of identity, striving for civil rights and justice or to be engaged in defining alternative lifestyles or culture, an approach typified by the women’s, gay and lesbian, ecological and peace movements. Social movements were defined by Sidney Tarrow (1998: 4) as ‘collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities.’ The key to this definition is the assemblage and construction of grievances, common interests and issues into a package of resonant claims that help recruit supporters, define the movement’s aims and construct the unifying narrative that participants recognise and support. This construction process has been dubbed ‘identity work’ (Snow & McAdam 2000) and expresses itself in framing activity that defines ‘them and us’, marks out the boundaries of a constituency by identifying the opposition, and provides the shared signs and stories that bring movement participants together. It is the process of binding the symbols, metaphors, traditions and emotional claims of a movement into a collective identity that manifests its beliefs, and mobilises its constituency.

The concept of collective identity emanated from a debate among European social movement scholars in the mid-1980s and was to become one of the main theoretical frameworks of social movement study. In the hands of Alberto Melucci (1989, 1996) collective identity became an incisive analytical tool that focused attention on the relationships developed by individual participants in social movements and reclaimed a role for emotion, conflict and negotiation in movement construction. Melucci defined collective identity as a continuous
process of group debate around the material experiences, grievances, and antagonisms of participants that generated goals and strategies and was a fundamental prerequisite for collective action to take place.

New social movement theory poses a challenge to the Marxist assertion that collective action is principally propelled by material interests generated by class position, because it focuses on the development of consciousness and the articulation and affirmation of identity rather than on the structural location of interests in a social hierarchy (Pakulski 1995). When the new social movement concept of collective identity is applied to the theory of class struggle, collective action becomes the parent of material interests rather than the offspring and class formation is interpreted as the outcome of the construction of the shared interests, norms and values developed through mobilisation (Eder 1995). This inversion of the Marxist conundrum of how a ‘class in itself’ can become a ‘class for itself’ (Marx [1847] 1975) was expressed by Alain Touraine (1981: 68) in the declaration: ‘there can be no class without class consciousness’. Consciousness emerges, it was argued, when people feel and express the common identity of their interests and define themselves against the interests of others (Meiksins Wood 1995, Sewell 1990). In this literature, class interest became understood as an identity that was constructed by a social movement rather than as an objective property of structural divisions. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) developed this thesis further in their contention that the interests of a social movement are defined by the process of identity construction and have no material pre-existence; in other words, collective identity retroactively creates the interests it claims to represent.

Collective identity proved an effective and adaptable theory for interpreting the development of the women’s movement, and the gay and lesbian movements whose principle objective was to either reclaim a repudiated identity or to assert an identity that had been marginalised or ignored (Bernstein 1997, Taylor & Whittier 1992, 1995). This concentration on identity led to a characterisation of social movement theory as ‘the politics of recognition’ (Fraser 1995a: 69), and as supposedly privileging cultural and symbolic concerns over the bread-and-butter of material issues. A resurgence in class-based analysis was triggered in response to this cultural depiction of social movement theory and it has been argued since that community or urban movements should continue to be conceptualised as class struggle (Ferguson 2000, Somerville 2005a). Entering
this controversy on the opposing side, Judith Butler (1997c) parodied the characterisation of social movements as ‘merely cultural’, maintaining that it was the rejection of certain forms of political activity by a materialist left orthodoxy in the first place that constructed the new social movements.

Two developments in social movement theory served to heal this rift and return class, though now shorn of its historical mission, and redistributive concerns to the heart of contentious politics. One was the re-emergence of interest in urban social movements in USA and Europe, which, with associated research into ‘poor people’s movements’ (Piven & Cloward 1977), stressed the material demands of collective action; the second was the parallel development in England of the concept of ‘social welfare movements’ (Williams 1992) a classification that captured the redistributive goals of community-based struggles. New research into urban social movements jettisoned Manuel Castells’ (1976) restrictive definition to classify a diverse range of collective action under one grouping; a collection that proved amenable to the inclusion of the labour movement as a social movement and a force for change in the city (Pickvance 2003). In urban movement theory, studies of the desperate mobilisations of homeless people could be considered alongside inner city squatting campaigns that might in other social movement theorisations have been defined as lifestyle or cultural protests (Nicholls & Beaumont 2004). Studies of urban movements and ‘poor people’s movements’, with their focus on the local rather than the national, appeared well placed to respond to the dilemmas of incorporation and co-option that arose from the 1980s onwards as municipal governments, following liberal market theories, outsourced public services to citizens’ organisations or sought to involve them in limited decision-making (Kavoulakos 2006, Pruijt 2003). These increasing threats to welfare systems from neo-liberal city administrations, national governments and global institutions caused urban movement and ‘poor people’s movement’ theorists to lean towards what had seemed a peculiarly English interest in the role of collective action in shaping definitions of citizenship, universal needs and social welfare (Roth 2000).

In England the new social movements mostly evolved out of community-based struggles (Cowley et al 1977, Lovenduski & Randall 1993), and their approach to the welfare state and to the issues of housing, health and social care gave them common cause on the question of ‘who controlled welfare and in whose
interests’, as Fiona Williams (1994: 64) put it. Williams sought to reconcile the rivalry between ‘old’ and ‘new’ social movements with her concept of the ‘social welfare movement’ that fused the politics of recognition and redistribution (Williams 1992). Through community-based groups and loose networks of local organisations, social welfare movements celebrated their rejection of hierarchical decision-making, experimented with and promoted participative and direct democracy, and endorsed the authenticity of experiential knowledge (Wainwright 2003, Della-Porta & Diani 2006). The diverse demands of the women’s movement, gay and lesbian groups, tenants associations and ethnic minority organisations all identified gaps in welfare provision brought about by the imposition of restrictive definitions of universal need. The development of refuges for women fleeing their violent partners, for example, highlighted the failure of housing and social services to identify domestic violence as an issue for intervention (Lent 2001), and the work of Women’s Aid has been hailed by Jalna Hanmer (1977) as a bridge between the housing struggles of tenants’ and the women’s movement. Similarly the growth of the disabled people’s movement and the development of organisations of people with learning difficulties and mental health service users challenged definitions of need, rights and autonomy in the organisation of the health service that have parallels for social housing tenants (Oliver 1990, Williams 1992, Barnes 1999).

Where the feminist movement, gay and lesbian groups, ethnic minority campaigns and organisations of disabled people and mental health users have all been defined through the concept of collective identity and fixed with the label of identity politics, the tenants’ movement, despite sharing many of their characteristics, has remained very firmly an ‘old’ social movement. Urban movements, ‘poor people’s movements’ and social welfare movements, however, provide a legitimate framework in which social movement theory can be applied to understand the collective action of tenants, and to consider the construction of a tenants’ movement, not as the property of an essential material interest, but as the development of a collective and contentious identity. Studies of class-consciousness among tenants’ groups in community action literature provide an approach to this new analysis of tenant collective action. Frustrated community action practitioners were concerned to inquire why class-consciousness did not develop from local struggles and whether tenants’ organisations had the potential to become a political movement (Bolger et al 1981, Jacobs 1984). An analysis by Bert Moorhouse and colleagues of the East
London rent strikes from 1968 to 1970 provided an influential commentary on this issue. Moorhouse, Wilson and Chamberlain (1972: 151) identified the rent strike as ‘a clear form of class struggle’ but found no explicitly articulated class-consciousness among tenant activists and no expressions of ideology. What their study did find was a perception of ‘them and us’ among the rent strikers and their support base, an overwhelming sense that their views were not taken into account and a belief that they had no power or influence in decision-making. The tenants shared a perception that the law was not impartial, and a sense that illegal actions, like withholding rent or squatting, were justifiable and necessary. The research concluded:

“We suggest that while rent strikes and other varieties of ill-reported urban protest do not involve their participants in a clear vision of a new social order, they do reveal something of that muted, defensive “counter-ideology” of the working class, which is the basis of the development of class consciousness in the classical sense’ (Moorhouse, Wilson & Chamberlain 1972: 153).

These attitudes among the East London rent strikers and their supporters, reported by Moorhouse and colleagues, have been represented by Ross McKibbin (1998: 139) as ‘a kind of folk-Marxism’ generated through the accumulation of grievances in working class experience and expressed in a muted certainty of the unequal distribution of rewards. This grumbling expression of ‘them and us’ lends itself to interpretation through collective identity theory as the construction of ‘boundary markers’ (Taylor & Whittier 1992), in the traditions, narratives and emotional responses that establish a distinct identity necessary for a movement to form and that separate public housing tenants as ‘us’ while declaring their antagonism to ‘them’, the perpetrators of injustice. As Moorhouse, Wilson and Chamberlain point out, however, this construction of a shared consciousness is not enough to mobilise a social movement with goals, strategies and plans of action: the key attributes of collective identity defined by Alberto Melucci (1989: 35).

In more recent work examining the mobilisation of tenants groups against Housing Action Trusts in 1988 and 1989, Rachel Woodward (1991: 49) noted how the divisions between council tenants were overcome and a working unity constructed ‘through a continual process of discussion and debate’ at tenants
association and campaign meetings. Woodward charted the careful process of negotiation by which this unity was pieced together and traced the development of the narratives and arguments that patched over the ethnic divisions between tenants and coalesced support around an idea of council housing as the outcome of tenant struggle, and therefore something to be defended, and that situated tenants as a powerful force that could defeat the threat to council housing from Conservative proposals to remove estates from public ownership. What Woodward was describing appears to be the construction of a collective identity robust enough to mobilise a range of disparate tenants groups and individuals into an anti-Housing Action Trust campaign. This identity had to be constructed before a movement could be mobilised and it was pieced together by framing a set of interests that could be expected to exert an emotional pull on council tenants and could therefore be applied as the focal point of collective action.

These studies straddling two key periods of mobilisation provide a tantalising glimpse of the possibilities of an application of collective identity theory to the organisation of an English tenants’ movement. Collective identity offers an analysis of the mobilisation process that does not depend on the identification of objective interests common to all social housing tenants, whether those are understood as class interests or the interests of consumers, but that focuses attention on the actual processes of identity construction or how movements are built from a series of negotiations, narratives, grievances and perceptions. By paying attention to this complex series of interactions and relationships, it may be possible to understand the process whereby disparate individuals are drawn into collective action and the means by which the barriers to mobilisation are overcome; to listen, for once, to the voice of the tenants’ movement in its own words, and assess its achievements on its own terms.

Any such interpretation needs to situate the construction of a movement identity in the context of the dominant identificatory processes that regulate the behaviour of subjects and limit the possibilities of their actions. Collective identity should not be seen as the ‘authentic’ voice of tenants, nor should it be portrayed as a discourse of resistance or liberation, something of a tendency in social movement theory. Since the social construction of identity always takes place within power relations, ‘the oppressed are actively encouraged to construct identities that reaffirm the basic validity of [the] dominant moral order’, as the
feminist theorist Celia Kitzinger (1989: 94) noted. In *The Power of Identity* (2004: 7-8) Manuel Castells, devised a typology to distinguish identificatory discourses according to their origins, separating ‘legitimising identity’, that stems from the dominant institutions of society, from ‘resistance identity’, or the constructions of oppressed groups. Michael Schwalbe and Douglas Mason-Schrock (1996) also thought it was possible to separate ‘oppressive identity work’ from other types of identity construction processes. In the restructuring of social housing and the wider welfare state, tenants are subject to a set of identifications shaped by governmental and institutional discourse that are inscribed in material practice and acted out in everyday life. While it has been argued that welfare service users construct identities around the role they play in the restructuring of the welfare state to build up collective power as social movements (Carr 2007), David Taylor (1998: 342) has drawn attention to the way in which ‘identity categories become inscribed in welfare discourse, positioning their subjects with ascribed characteristics’. The welfare service user has been groomed into a self-reliant entrepreneur capable of exercising choice and of taking rational decisions about her own interests (Marsh 2004, Clarke 2005), and the identities of the ‘responsible tenant’ and the active citizen have prescribed the practices of tenant participation (Flint 2004a). While these categories are riddled with ambiguity and contain the possibility that they can be used to express opposition to imposed identifications, any study of the identities constructed in and around the formation of a social movement must situate them as the outcome of a process of regulation and subjection, and interpret the social movement as a force for ‘domestication’ as well as resistance (Butler 2000:150).

This chapter has explored the way the identity of a tenants’ movement has been constructed around the concept of material interest, the collective interest of class position and the individual interest of the sovereign consumer. A process of active identity construction has shaped the narrative of tenants’ history, and crafted the contemporary discourse of the movement at a careful distance from the social movements with which it shares many characteristics. The contention put forward in the conclusion of this chapter is that the social movement theory of collective identity provides an analytical tool to explore the processes that construct the organisation, aims and objectives of the tenants’ movement and that it is in an analysis of this ‘identity work’ that the tenants’ movement can be understood. The next chapter sets out the methods necessary to research the collective identity of the tenants’ movement.
Chapter 4

Research Strategies

This chapter sets out a research strategy to investigate the tenants' movement of England, its aims, objectives and beliefs, through the identity work of its participants. The strategy is founded on the assertion that identity construction work is central to the formation and maintenance of social movements. The twin theories of collective identity and collective action frames have dominated social movement thought for more than twenty years and are applied here to guide the sampling strategy and data collection, and provide criteria against which the research findings can be analysed.

The unit of analysis for this research is contained in the concept of ‘identity work’, defined by its originators as ‘a range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities’ (Snow & Anderson 1987: 1348), and later adapted to stand for the discursive elements of collective identity construction (Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock 1996). Identity work has appeared in social movement studies chiefly in the form of the written or spoken word, as ‘political talk’ (Gamson 1992b), ‘vocabularies of motive’ (Benford 1993), and as narrative (Polletta 1998a, 1998b) or ‘identity talk’ (Snow & Anderson 1987). Types of identity talk include framing activities in which the aims, objectives and values of the social movement are defined and packaged, the construction of boundary markers, through which the group establishes its oppositional identity, as well as the affirmation of goals, tactics and plans of action. A research strategy focused on identity talk, as the exemplar of identity work, calls attention to dialogue as the attribution of identity, and to the creative capacity of language to produce new meanings and identifications.

The chapter begins with an assessment of collective identity theory and explores its conjunction with the concept of collective action frames, before clarifying the idea of identity talk as the framework for data collection. This discussion outlines the key methodological concepts and analytical tools that are applied in later chapters. It moves on to define the research subject, the tenants' movement, and distinguish that subject from the often-trod field of community studies, and to set out the sampling and data collection scheme. The chapter
then turns to an assessment of the conversational and frame analysis techniques that are employed to examine the construction of identity in the tenants’ movement. This research strategy is framed within an ethical awareness of the tenants’ movement as a subaltern group; a ‘poor people’s movement’ that has been written about and spoken for, but rarely listened to, or allowed to express its own voice.

Constructing collective identity

‘Collective identity is a learning process that leads to the formation and maintenance of a unified empirical actor that we call a social movement,’ (Melucci 1995: 49).

Alberto Melucci’s research with grass-roots social movements in Italy yielded a direct and empirically-tested course of research into the processes of identity work, noting three dimensions to the construction of collective identity: the formation of cognitive frameworks concerning the goals, the means and the strategies of collective action, the development of group relationships through processes of communication, negotiation and decision-making, and the emotional commitment of participants to the collective and to each other (Melucci 1989: 35). Melucci’s robust definition of a three dimensional construct can be applied as the litmus test of a social movement and Carol Mueller (1994: 246) explained that to evidence a collective identity: ‘specific individuals must be identified who have formed emotional bonds from their interaction, negotiated a sense of group membership and made a plan for change (or a series of plans) however tentative, with goals, means, and a consideration of environmental constraints’.

For Melucci it was the relationships within a network, and the production within relationships of shared cognitive frameworks that was the object of study. Collective identity is constructed through interaction and is made up of different and sometimes contradictory definitions; it is not a unified and consistent belief system (Melucci 1996: 70). But it has been often reified by social movement theorists so that it is understood as an end-state which, at its least defined, appears as a condition of group solidarity, or in-group identification: the ‘shared definition of a group that derives from members’ common interests, experiences
and solidarity' (Taylor & Whittier 1995: 172) or simply ‘what movements do to construct a sense of “we”’ (Melucci 1989: 74). In assuming collective identity as something ‘given’ by the existence of a movement, social movement scholars have conflated it with social identity theory (Tajfel 1981, Brewer & Silver 2000), and have fixed on the connection between personal and collective identity, concerned with how an individual’s sense of identification becomes collective. This is a research area dubbed the ‘identity convergence’ problem (Stoecker 1995), and the ‘identity / movement nexus’ (Snow & McAdam 2000); and was summarised by the pioneer of social movement studies, Charles Tilly (1985: 727) expressively as: ‘how do thousands of individual decisions accumulate into a large social movement?’

Judith Butler approaches the concept of identity not as the achievement of the individual in response to social relations or roles, but as a ‘stylised repetition of acts’ (Butler 1993: 114), and as the effect of discursive practices. Collective identity is not the study of how an essential identity can be extended, shared or adapted in Butler’s thesis; it should be understood as a process in which normative identifications, sedimented in ritual and convention, are reproduced, contested and applied to new ends. The salient question remains, however, how individuals make collective identity, and social movement theory has proved adept at sidestepping this issue and studying instead the networks and structures in which it is constructed. A body of work has been generated on the notion of ‘free spaces’, which, it is argued, play a pivotal role in allowing participants to develop a collective identity by providing shelter to the construction of oppositional discourses. Melucci (1989) argued for the existence of ‘submerged networks’ as underground laboratories where collective identity is shaped in a period of latency and awakened in periods of conflict, while others characterised these networks as ‘protected havens that are relatively isolated from the surveillance, the ideas and the repression of elites’ (Fantasia & Hirsch 1995: 156). In the study of free spaces the processes of identity construction appear taken for granted as the inevitable outcome of certain structures. Scholars have effectively defined the context within which collective identity may develop but have avoided the more difficult task of analysing the method of its construction (Polletta 1999), or they have simply shifted the construction process outside the timeframe under research (see for example Friedman and McAdam 1992 or Couto 1993 on how collective identities redefine existing roles). In researching the construction of collective identity it is necessary to
understand the process by which individuals develop the cognitive frameworks, emotional ties and shared relationships that make collective action possible. The theory of free spaces or havens is useful because it attempts to capture the character of the associational ties developed in particular contexts, but as Francesca Polletta argued (1999) this should not be a study of structures, or physical spaces, but of culture. What should be examined is the identity talk undertaken in specific relationships and situations.

The study of identity talk is founded on the view that collective identity should be approached through an analysis of discourse, particularly conversation and narrative, and that the aim of research should be to examine the construction of frames of meaning by a social movement, arguing that ‘making claims about the characteristics of the group is central to the process of identity construction’ (Taylor & Whittier 1995: 173). The focus on framing devices in discourse bridges an Atlantic divide between two traditions of social movement studies and fuses the theory of collective identity with the diagnostic approach of frame analysis first established in 1986 by David Snow and colleagues in the United States. Framing processes are attempts by social movements to organise individuals’ understanding and guide their action. Borrowing from the symbolic interactionist tradition, and specifically from the work of Erving Goffman, David Snow & Robert Benford (1988) applied the concept of the interpretive frame to explain how social movement leaders recruit followers to their cause. Collective action frames are, in their definition, schemata of interpretation that enable people to understand new situations, events or actions in terms of what is already familiar and meaningful.

‘Social movements and their agents frame or assign meaning to and interpret relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilise potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilise antagonists’ (Snow & Benford 1988: 198).

David Snow et al (1986) originally put forward four types of frame alignment processes which they argued were necessary conditions for social movement participation: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension and frame transformation. Each of these processes entail social movement activists attempting to link their interpretation of events to the frame of reference of potential recruits by tapping into a shared sense of grievance, by appealing to
people with similar values or beliefs, by associating the movement with popular interests, or by radically redefining dominant interpretations of events to change the way individuals perceive them. Snow and Benford (1988) developed the initial concept by arguing that collective action frames had three core tasks: diagnosis, prognosis and motivation. A frame identified an injustice or a grievance and laid blame for that wrong on some defined agent; it proposed a solution to the diagnosed problem or at least provided an initial plan of attack; and it inspired corrective action, providing what Benford (1993:196) called ‘vocabularies of motive’. In summary, collective action frames must make people feel aggrieved, optimistic and keyed up for action all at the same time (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly 2001). In order to explain why some framing processes achieve this heady mix and some do not, Snow and Benford (1988) introduced the concept of frame resonance. They argued that the effectiveness of a collective action frame depended on its credibility, implying a judgement on the veracity of the social movement organisers and the consistency of the frame’s discursive components, and on the salience of the frame to the experiences and reflections of its potential recruits. Some frames, it is argued, are so resonant that they succeed in embedding contentious ideas and concepts in popular discourse, so providing ammunition for future social movements. These ‘master frames’ (Snow & Benford 1992) may be generated at the start of a cycle of protest and go on to inspire and legitimate movements that follow, just as the Civil Rights movement in the United States in the early 1960s provided a framework for future mobilisations around women’s rights and the rights of gays and lesbians.

The concept of collective action frames has proved central to the understanding of social movements and provides a sturdy tool for empirical research. Assessing the legacy of the concept, Robert Benford and David Snow (2000) counted 500 journal articles published in a five year period citing the core literature on collective action frames. By itself though, the concept might have proved of doubtful use, as it appears to encourage researchers to believe that mobilising a movement is the same as marketing a product for consumers; a matter of finding the right frame, and pushing the right buttons (Gamson 1992b). When applying frame analysis, scholars have tended to focus on the views of activists clearly articulated in leaflets or speeches generating the idea that collective action frames are fixed frameworks of thought, imposed by leaders on followers (Steinberg 1998). It took the parallel development of the concept of collective identity to focus the attention of scholars on how social movements
develop, and how the discursive content of frames is negotiated, and to propel collective action frames and frame analysis into territory where culture, ideology and emotion held sway.

William Gamson (1992b) was among the first to merge the independent concepts of collective action frames and collective identity, theorising that identity was one of three essential components of any frame. Frames, he argued, engage people's emotional reaction to injustice, empower them by making change possible and attribute to them and to their adversaries an identity that, on the one hand, embodies a combative movement and, on the other, humanises and renders vulnerable a ‘they’ who must be challenged. Identity was not an add-on to collective action frames, it was the language through which they were expressed; for injustice to be framed it must be asserted as a collective grievance, and a shared ownership claimed of what otherwise would remain insolvable individual disadvantages. For those responsible for injustice to be identified as targets, in-group and out-group distinctions must be made and above all movement participants must come to believe they are ‘potential agents of their own history,’ (Gamson 1992b: 7). Gamson’s re-reading of the process of collective action framing melded the interactionist themes of identity construction with the structured approach of frame analysis, giving rise to the concept of ‘identity fields’ as the outcome of framing activity, and broadening the classic model of framing tasks to include boundary framing and audience framing, until it was possible to state that ‘identity constructions are inherent in all social movement framing activities,’ (Hunt, Benford & Snow 1994: 185) and to refer to ‘collective identity frames’ (Melucci 1995: 43). The merger of the two models meant that social movement theory now had a dependable tool with which to analyse the stories, vocabularies and narratives in which individuals shape their relationship to hegemonic discourse, and their emerging challenge to it as the creators of a collective identity.

Hegemony and identity work

Social movements are not the sole authors of interpretive frames but it took Marc Steinberg’s (1998) intervention in the journal article Tilting the Frame to introduce the social movement tradition to discourse studies and to the
realisation that the hegemonic discourses that define common sense, and provide the vocabulary for an understanding of ‘reality’, are also conveyed as frames. As William Gamson (1992a: 68) explained, hegemonic legitimating frames already dominate the fields of meaning and ‘would-be challengers face the problem of overcoming a definition of the situation that they themselves may take as part of the natural order’. Frames serve as accenting devices, or signalling mechanism that underscore or embellish aspects of discourse in order to achieve an overall redefinition; they have a transformative function in articulating established discourses ‘so that one set of meanings rather than another is told’ (Snow 2004: 384). While hegemonic discourses serve to reinforce established meanings, and often perpetuate and justify disadvantage and exclusion, encouraging acceptance and passivity, the frames that convey these meanings can be realigned and reoriented towards resistance and action (Snow & Benford 1992, Tarrow 1992). The processes of frame alignment can therefore be seen as hegemonic and counter-hegemonic attempts to shape discursive elements into a unity that perpetuates or challenges the current configuration of power (Steinberg 1998). The frame appears as the basic tool of discourse, operating through categories, metaphors and analogies, sequencing events, and attributing causes and consequences, and frame alignment is the semantic process through which dominant discourses are reproduced and competing narratives are engendered (Donati 1992).

This territory was innovatively explored in the 1920s by the trio of Soviet linguistic philosophers in the Bakhtin Circle. Valentin Volosinov’s ([1929] 1986) Marxism and the Philosophy of Language charts the process whereby hegemonic discourse, expressed in ideological signs, constitutes a subjectivity through dialogue, and through dialogue inevitably changes it. The spoken word is a dialogic site of social struggle, Volosinov argued, and, as Judith Butler was to do many years later, he pointed to the power of the verbal sign, in its ‘social multiaccentuality’, to maintain ‘its vitality and dynamism and the capacity for further development’ ([1929] 1986: 23). Ruling groups attempt to stabilise the contradictions embedded in ideological signs by establishing how they are to be accented, by trying to make only one accentuation possible in ‘speech performances’ and ‘speech genres’, but words have an inner dialogic quality that contains the ever-present possibility of change. It is in dialogue that ‘the barely noticeable shifts and changes’ can be observed and studied as Volosinov concluded: ‘In the verbal medium, in each utterance, however trivial it may be,
Identity talk is the process of constructing the action system of a social movement (Melucci 1995). It should therefore be possible for a researcher to make statements about the strength, capacity and effectiveness of a social movement from an analysis of identity talk. The accounts of tenant campaigns by Bert Moorhouse, Wilson and Chamberlain (1972) and Rachel Woodward (1991), discussed in Chapter Three, illustrate that identity construction processes in the tenants’ movement can be observed in interview or conversation analysis with tenants. These twin studies also illuminate the limitations of this approach to identity attribution. Simply pointing to the occurrence of boundary markers in conversation, or analysing the deliberative construction of common cause in conversation is not sufficient for the researcher to make statements about the tenants’ movement as a social movement. A typology of identity talk processes that can be observed, coded and applied to support an overall assertion of the direction of the tenants’ movement first needs to be established. It is necessary to define the elements of identity talk that construct a movement as something more than a collection of personal histories or statements asserting ‘in-group’, ‘out-group’ membership (Klandermans & de Weerd 2000), and to understand how these identifications can be interrogated in order to make statements about the movement itself, its level of organisation, the clarity of its strategy, the unity of its membership, and adherence to its aims.

between the challenging group and its adversaries and can be laid down through institutions, symbols, framing or narrative. Consciousness was the name Taylor and Whittier gave to framing processes that define the common interests of the group. The production of stories, interpretations and self-definitional frameworks confirm a shared consciousness, or interpretive framework, while group members internalise these movement values in cultural practices manifested in their everyday behaviour, transforming their own sense of self through their speech, clothing and conduct, a process the authors dubbed negotiation or the politicisation of everyday life. This framework can usefully be added to the analytical tools already provided in studies of identity framing activity (Gamson 1992b, Hunt, Benford & Snow 1994) and complements Melluci’s own three-way research process in which the formulation of cognitive frameworks concerning the ends, means and field of action is central to the construction of social movements (Melucci 1996).

Support for this composite analytical framework comes from studies of group identification processes in social psychology (Kelly & Breinlinger 1996, Stryker 2000, Abrams & Hogg 2003). The articulation of a grievance, the assertion of blame on an external agent, and the belief that change is possible, are all understood to be necessary conditions for a high level of group identification to lead to collective action. A perception of disadvantage or stigma reinforces the feelings of common fate that leads to strong group identification. The promotion of a set of shared values, and emotional claims drawing on a sense of injustice and stressing collective efficacy, or the ability to bring about change are seen as key factors (Tajfel 1981, Brewer & Silver 2000). Viktor Gecas (2000) has pointed to the importance of shared values in social identity formation, arguing that values act as organising factors that provide the motivations that encourage a sense of efficacy, and contribute to the definition of movement goals and strategies. There appear to be four key elements in social psychology theory that can guide research into identity talk: a strong in-group identification and out-group differentiation and a feeling of shared fate; an awareness of disadvantage, deprivation and injustice with the source of grievance identified externally; salient common values and strong emotional responses; and a belief that the individual and therefore the group can change things. When analytical definitions from social movement theory are added to this framework a matrix can be devised (see Table 1) to guide the analysis of identity talk within the tenants’ movement and set clear criteria against which it can be assessed.
Table 1: Analytical matrix for research into identity talk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group identification</th>
<th>Boundary marking, identification of antagonists, awareness of disadvantage, in-group negotiation and joint decision-making processes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>The development of goals, tactics, and action plans achieved through a consciousness of shared injustice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Emotional commitment, expressions of belief, symbolic behaviour, and the development of feelings of shared fate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficacy</td>
<td>Belief in change, plans for change, the construction of stories and behaviour that symbolises change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through this framework, research into the identity work of the tenants’ movement has a standard against which the reproduction and contestation of identity can be assessed, and the strength of the organisation, and the coherence of its strategies can be evaluated.

**Sampling strategies**

Identity talk in social movements has been examined on different layers and for William Gamson (1992b, 1995) there were three: the organisation, the movement and, what he called the ‘solidary group’ and Randy Stoecker (1995: 112) called the social movement community. The focus for this study is on the layer of the movement, the tenants’ movement and its interface with the organisation, the tenants’ association, tenants’ panel or board, or tenants’ federation, and it investigates the aims and objectives of those organisations and the means by which the movement is mobilised.

Defining the movement, however, presents something of a methodological challenge. The idea of a tenants’ movement expresses the concept of a horizontal network of organisations connected by elected delegates from the locally-based association, through the borough-wide federation, and the regional confederation to the national organisation Taroe and on to the International
Neighbourhood tenants and residents associations have been cited in community studies since Ruth Durant’s (1939) work on the Watling Association and have been portrayed as short-lived and fractious in some of these accounts (Ravetz 2001), and by Stuart Lowe (1986) and others before him, as pursuing either purely social or political aims, but not both. Research by Liz Cairncross and colleagues (1992) produced a more nuanced picture of tenants and residents organisations engaged in a range of activities that includes negotiating with housing organisations, councils and other statutory agencies, agitating and campaigning on local issues and promoting ‘community spirit’ through social activities. While the tenants and residents association remains the classic model for a self-organised tenants movement, as the autonomous organic unit developing on council and housing association estates (Ward 1974), the contemporary movement has by no means such clear definition. Neighbourhood associations are set up by social housing organisations to fulfil their requirements for customer involvement, individual tenants may serve on scrutiny panels or monitor their landlord formally as tenant inspectors, and a number of informal or temporary tenant panels, forums and focus groups are convened by landlords, through which tenants express their views and potentially contribute to policy development (Morgan 2006). The concept of a self-organised tenants’ movement is now impossible and unhelpful to maintain; it would be more accurate to state that the movement is now almost entirely defined by its involvement in tenant participation with social housing landlords and governmental agencies (Grayson 2007).

Only about three per cent of all social housing tenants are involved in tenant groups. But the movement should also be conceived as a network that links activists and non-activists within the same geographical community in a cross-cutting pattern of interaction. Around 38 per cent of social housing tenants are aware of their local tenants and residents association (TSA 2009). Residents of social housing who are members of tenants’ organisations may routinely meet those that are not in public places, at the bus stop or the post office, and are linked by bonds of personal commitment and interdependency, the ‘intersecting social networks in which the collective of movement members are embedded’ (Stoecker 1995: 12). Individuals who may not be members of the same tenants’ organisation or members of any organisation are linked through their landlords’ participation processes, and the fact that they share a concern with the
representation of residents’ views. How an individual identifies with a social movement represents a fourth layer of research into identity work, and contributes a structural dynamic that helps focus on the processes of convergence between individuals at movement and organisational level. Lesley Andrews’ (1979) fascinating and detailed study of a neighbourhood tenants’ association revealed the web of family relationships and friendships that extend the activities of the association outside of its formal meetings and committee structure into the wider social networks of the neighbourhood. This diversity in movement participation was expanded beyond the ranks of council tenants by the success of the Right to Buy, and has been broadened more widely by policies aimed at breaking-up a council monopoly of social housing, developing ‘mixed communities’, and financing a range of affordable housing options, including shared ownership and intermediate market renting: new housing products that are statutorily defined, along with housing association and council tenancies, as social housing (Housing and Regeneration Act 2008). What were once mono-tenure housing estates now present a range of tenures and tenants’ and residents’ associations may include council tenants, housing association tenants, leaseholders, former council tenants who have transferred to a housing association or bought their own home, private tenants and private tenants who were once social housing tenants, part-owners and home-owners with no previous experience as a tenant.

For the purposes of this sample, the ‘tenants’ movement’ is defined as all those engaged in resident participation activities with social landlords. This definition has the advantage of demarcating the focus of study from a separate field of research into community regeneration programmes and ‘community’ (see for example Karn 2007 or Brent 2009) and distinguishing the community development functions of the tenants’ movement that are primarily aimed at mobilising ‘solidarity around an estate consciousness’ (Olechnowicz 1997: 200) from what Alison Ravetz (2001: 145) called the ‘cultural colonisation’ that has made community a civic duty and a vehicle for social control. It is acknowledged that tenants’ organisations may organise summer galas, daytrips, sports activities and clubs, and address themselves to a wide spectrum of social issues, however, community activities are only the focus of this study in so much as they relate to the tenants’ movement in its orientation to public policy. A firm distinction between tenants’ organisations and community associations has been asserted by Eileen and Stephen Yeo (1988) who cited efforts by landlords
to direct their newly formed tenants groups to occupy themselves with fostering good neighbourliness rather than confront their landlord over tenancy issues. The Yeos contend that the concept of community has been used to defuse conflict between tenants and landlords and to contain a tenants’ movement. Community associations may negotiate with local authorities and other statutory agencies to improve local facilities or to deliver welfare services; this is a rich field of study but community development work is not the subject of this research.

Defining the tenants’ movement through the activity of participation presents a broad field of potential participants for study and includes as research subjects tenants, leaseholders, and owner-occupiers while tenant participation activities can range from filling out a satisfaction survey for a landlord to serving as a director on a social housing company. Tenants and residents could be said to have participated by attending a one-off focus group organised by their landlord, yet participation would also describe an individual’s twenty-year commitment to leading a local association, or the project of developing a citywide or even a national organisation. The strategy adopted here was to situate the social movement organisation at the heart of this study and to collect research data from participants in tenants and residents associations, borough tenants’ federations, constituted tenants’ panels and forums, the regional or national tenants’ federations and national tenant campaign groups. Participants were defined as those who attend the meetings and public events held by these organisations. The characteristics of these organisations are that they are formal groups with written constitutions, elected committees or regular attendance; their members have the ability to define their own aims and strategy, develop group relationships and pursue the processes of identity construction. This focus on the members of organised groups included tenant directors on the management boards of social housing companies, and tenant management organisations or housing co-operatives where tenants have been elected or selected by interview to a term of office and play a role in the policy formation of institutions.

Two methods of stratification were used in this study. The first stratified tenant movement participants according to the geographical range and strategic scope of their organisational participation. At neighbourhood level the research focused on tenants or residents who take part in meetings or events organised by their local constituted tenants and residents association, or who organise tenants and
residents association activities. At citywide or landlord-wide level the sample included tenants and residents who are members or participants in the activities of a constituted tenants’ federation, a formal landlord-wide tenants’ panel or forum or tenant inspection team, or who are directors on the board of social housing or tenant management companies. At regional and national level the research targeted tenants and residents who are executive committee members of one of the regional tenants organisations or a board member of the Tenants and Residents Organisations of England (Taroe), National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations (NFTMO), the short-lived National Tenants Voice, the Confederation of Co-operative Housing or organisers of national tenant campaigns such as Defend Council Housing, Right to Rent or the Moonlight Robbery Campaign.

The second system of stratification that was applied uses a framework based on Albert Hirschman’s (1970) concept of ‘exit’ and ‘voice’ to differentiate between the strategies applied by participants in the tenants movement, and whether those strategies are approached collectively or individually. In the ‘voice’ strata research was carried out with tenants who negotiate with their landlord or represent their views to the landlord by attending the meetings of tenants and residents associations or taking part in panels and focus groups organised by the landlord. In the ‘exit’ strata, those residents who have left the social housing sector by exercising their right to buy, or by otherwise becoming owner-occupiers, and those who have moved to the private rented sector but who are still active in the tenants movement through local, city-wide, regional and national organisations were sampled. For the hybrid strategy of ‘exit and voice’, those tenants who have collectively taken over the management of their own homes through a tenant management organisation, or collective ownership through a housing co-operative, or asset transfer were included, along with members of campaign groups that resolutely reject particular aspects of government housing policy. There was a clear correlation between these two stratification systems and the data collection straddled both systems to ensure that tenants at all levels and strategies of participation were included.
Data collection

Data collection was carried out through focus groups followed by semi-structured interviews and took place from mid-2008 to mid-2010. Research was undertaken with the 144 housing association and council tenants, owner-occupiers, leaseholders, and private tenants, active within tenants’ organisations and formal participation processes (see Appendix 1). In total 12 focus groups were held with 133 participants, with the average session lasting one and a half hours. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 11 participants, including two paired interviews, lasting one hour on average. Seven focus groups were designed to study a specific organisational level of the movement: one focus group was held with participants from neighbourhood tenants and resident associations, one with individuals involved on a range of tenant panels, two were held with committee members of borough-wide tenants’ federations, one with board members of a tenant management organisation, and two with regional tenants’ federations. An additional five focus groups were held at the annual conference of TPAS, the national tenant participation agency that draws over 800 attendees from all levels of the tenants’ movement and all areas of England to a weekend of workshops and debates every August, an event seen as the principle networking opportunity for the movement. These focus groups were held as part of the conference in 2008, 2009 and 2010 and were advertised as open events. The attendees were self-selected, but reflected an extremely wide range of those engaged in participatory practices from tenants’ association committee members, tenants’ federation representatives, members of landlord forums and customer panels, tenant inspectors, tenant directors of social housing companies, and board members of tenant management organisations and of other tenant-led housing companies. A five question qualitative survey was included in the TPAS 2009 conference pack for delegates to discuss and respond to, and 33 of these were considered in analysis (see Appendix 2).

The sampling strategy was conceived to attain a broad geographical spread of organisations, and in addition to the four held at the national TPAS conference, focus groups were convened in four cities in the north and south of England. The age profile of the participants was typical of the tenants’ movement in that the majority were over the age of 50; 55 per cent were women and around 14
per cent were from ethnic minority communities. Tenants from housing associations, stock transfer organisations, arms-length management organisations and retained council housing authorities were sampled. The questions that guided the focus groups tested identity talk processes according to the criteria set out earlier, probing for group identification, strategy, values and efficacy (see Appendix 3). They were phrased to trigger discussion around the effectiveness of tenant collective action, and to encourage exploration of movement aims and deliberation on strategies.

The aim of the semi-structured interviews was to follow-up themes that had developed in the focus groups and study their origins in individual identity talk. Interviewees were selected from each organisational level and to ensure a range of strategic approaches: one interview from national level, two from regional federations, two from city federations, two from neighbourhood associations, one from a tenants’ panel, and two with tenant directors. The questions for the interviewees focused on their individual motivation, and encouraged reflection on their personal achievements, as well as deliberation of some of the frames of meaning that had surfaced in the group setting. A list of ten questions was prepared but additional topics raised by the interviewee were explored as well (see Appendix 4). The approach adopted was one recommended by Lynn Michell (1999) as an accompaniment to the use of focus groups, and expressed in the explanatory sub-title of her essay *Telling it how it is, telling it how it feels*. The questions for the semi-structured interviews sought to explore the emotional layer of identity work, seeking the source of grievances and boundary work in personal values and experiences, and tracing the personalisation of group beliefs and the physical embodiment of identity work and performative iteration in the individual subject. These semi-structured interviews also enabled the researcher to revisit focus group participants who might not have spoken freely in the group setting or whose views and opinions might have been shared only by a minority, and had been silenced, perhaps, by the pressure of mutual agreement. Those participants who were noticeably silent during group discussions, or who held contrary views, were approached after the focus groups and invited to take part in an interview where they might feel able to talk more freely. The two interviews with tenant directors, one interview with a city federation committee member and one interview with a neighbourhood association committee member were obtained in this manner.
The focus group has particular benefits for the study of identity work in that it allows individual thought-processes to be revealed, aligned, challenged, and negotiated collectively (Johnston 2002). Opinions and experiences are shared and conclusions drawn, as the participants define the group boundaries, attribute a source for grievances, and, perhaps, articulate and debate goals, and strategies. This process of deliberation in which individual speech acts become collective frames was advocated as a research method by William Gamson (1992b: 192) on the grounds that ‘the demands of discourse will push a group towards the adoption of a single frame’, allowing the process of collective identity frame construction to be witnessed and recorded. The positioning theorists Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré (1999) argue it is only in social interaction that identity work takes place, so the focus group has the potential to mirror the ideational processes that take place within a social movement, and the organisation of speech within the group, how it is sequenced, what vocabulary is used and how words are stressed, what roles are assumed and how individuals are positioned in conversation, and the conventions and narrative genres that are applied, can reveal the identity processes that take place in social movement organisations and among movement members (Myers & Macnaghten 1999). Many of the participants of the focus groups held at the TPAS conference expressed their appreciation of the opportunity to share their experiences and thoughts with other tenants and residents in similar situations. Four of the focus groups carried out with tenants federations took place immediately following a formal committee meeting of the organisation, in order to take the opportunity presented to bring the participants together, and this meant that the group discussion served as a more informal and discursive extension of the organisation’s own deliberations. In these situations the focus group approximated the ‘free spaces’ or ‘havens’ of social movement theory (Fantasia & Hirsch 1995, Polletta 1999), the supportive and sheltered environment in which personal experience can be shared and where misfortune can be transformed into injustice, and in which one person’s opinion can become a general call to arms (Gamson 1992b).

A decision was taken at the start of the research not to use the real names of the interviewees and focus group participants in the transcription. This decision was based on previous experience of interviewing tenant directors of social housing companies who feared they might be subject to disciplinary action from their boards if their published comments were felt to be critical (see Bradley
Since the research for this dissertation also involves tenant directors in interviews and focus groups it was felt prudent to anonymise all participants and undertakings of anonymity were given in securing informed consent. This meant that the names of all social housing companies and place names also had to be changed. The strategy adopted has been to indicate participants by an assumed first name thus maintaining some indicators of gender and cultural background where personal narratives are explored or conversational exchanges are analysed in detail, and to use pseudonyms where it is useful to refer to a particular housing organisation or to a specific locality to provide contextual information for the analysis of a movement organised on localities. Otherwise place or organisation names that occur in the transcripts have been omitted.

Although more than 140 people were involved in this research as attendees at focus groups and as interviewees, inevitably some were more vocal than others, and some focus groups and interviews yielded richer material for analysis. The discussions held at TPAS conferences were particularly rewarding in illustrating identity talk processes while focus groups held with some tenants organisations yielded articulate and complex examples of framing activities. Participants in these groups appear often in the analytical chapters that follow, however, every focus group and interview has been included in the analysis and more than 70 individual participants are directly quoted in the text. The schedule of focus groups and interviews is set out in Table 2, along with the ‘names’ of the participants who appear in the text. Contextual information is given for all participants whose identity talk is directly sampled and Table 2 can be utilised to locate them within the sampling strategy.

Table 2: Schedule of Focus Groups & Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>‘Names’ mentioned in the text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>TPAS Conference</td>
<td>Graham, Winston, Mary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>TPAS Conference</td>
<td>Stephanie, Karen, Paul, Ted, Joy,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Regional Tenants Federation</td>
<td>Gina, Theresa, Richard, Andrew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Residents Associations</td>
<td>Greta, Bob, Sara, Deirdre, Edna, Jane</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 Borough Tenants Federation Mina, Terri, Julia, Jan, David, Harry, Eileen, Ron
6 Regional Tenants Federation Henry, Sarjit, Jane, Najinder, Mick, Susan
7 TPAS Conference Maisie, Marcia, Robert, Denise, Cheryl, Muriel, Barbara, Fran, Georgia
8 TPAS Conference Clare, Yvonne, Sarah, Wendy, Linda
9 Tenant Management Organisation Gary, Jean, Christine, Eileen
10 Borough Tenants Federation Sandra, Bernard, Frank
11 Tenants Panels / Tenants Associations Mike, Lester, Jim, Andrew
12 TPAS Conference Nick, Stephen, Carmen

Semi-structured interviews
13 Borough Tenants Federation Brian & Elaine
14 Regional Tenants Federation Ron
15 Borough Tenants Federation / Tenant Director John
16 Residents Association Jean
17 Residents Association / Tenants Panel / Inspectors John & Kevin
18 Regional Tenants Federation Michael
19 National Tenants Federation Tony
20 Tenant Director Peter
21 Tenant Director Keith

Ethical concerns

At this point it is necessary for the researcher to come out from behind the screen of the passive voice and take what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak called an ‘I-slot’; so here I must introduce myself as the author and as someone who works for a tenants’ federation, and has worked with tenants’ organisations for 15 years, and who therefore has much in common with the radical community workers whose construction of the tenants’ movement as insurgency has been
criticised in a previous chapter. The tenants’ movement is characterised as a movement that has rarely spoken in its own words but has been revealed through the accounts of community workers or academics, and their narratives cannot hope to accurately reflect a movement that exists only in ‘the thoughts and practices of thousands of people in a host of localities’ (Hague 1990: 245). Academic reflections on the tenants’ movement risk mirroring the elite methodologies that ignore the subordinated or, at best, approach them in an attitude of ‘belittling befriending’ (Spivak 1996: 292). The tenants’ movement does not possess the resources, opportunities, or organisational ability to represent itself as fluently as the social movements that are the focus of most studies into collective identity or frame analysis, and it is more prone to enmeshment in the dominant identifications that give it shape; the entrapments of recognition and regulation that offer it definition and limit its possibilities. In his ethnographic research into life on a Bristol council estate, Jeremy Brent (2009: 37) observed that ‘being surveyed is a common experience of poor people and poor areas’. Brent recalled the voyeuristic fascination of writers such as Henry Mayhew and Edwin Chadwick with the behaviour of the poor and suggested a potential comparison with the detached position of the contemporary academic observer. The feminist researcher Maria Mies (1983: 122) has called for a consciously partial research methodology to replace this ‘view from above’ with ‘the view from below’, a motivation that, she argues, should shape the conduct of research strategies. The methodology of the participant observer has been recommended in the study of social movements as a means of avoiding the distant and voyeuristic gaze of the researcher (Lichterman 1998). ‘With respect to social movements this means organising actions and workshops, facilitating meetings, weighing in during strategic and tactical debates, staking out political positions and putting one’s body on the line during direct actions’, argues Jeffrey Juris (2008: 20) for the research strategy he calls ‘militant ethnography’. A similarly committed approach has been developed by Raymond Padilla (1993) who applied dialogical research methods aimed at fostering the development of critical awareness among subordinate groups to achieve Paulo Freire’s goal of ‘conscientisation’. Freire’s methods have been applied to the tenants’ movement, not just as a tool of analysis (McCormack 2008), but as a theoretical justification for the non-directive methods of action research adopted by the community workers and tenant participation agencies that have done so much to shape the contemporary image of the movement (Cooper & Hawtin 1998). These researchers have had
no problem ‘taking sides’, as Michael Newman calls it; like him, they have agreed the purpose of their community development work ‘is to teach defiance’ (Newman 2006: 10).

These research strategies reflect on the power and responsibility of the researcher. While all qualitative social research may inevitably be subject to claims that it is unconvincing or unrepresentative, the methods of action research and participant observation appear most problematic in the face of a ‘historically muted subject’ (Spivak 1988a: 295), a tenants’ movement that has seldom been able to represent itself, and which, when represented by researchers too often finds itself re-presented as caricature. My position working for a tenants’ federation, engaged at local, regional and national levels, would have enabled me to make first hand recordings of deliberations within tenants’ organisations and allowed me to obtain an account of identity work construction through observation of a multiple array of tenant interactions. The strategy of participant-observer would have supplied me also with numerous opportunities to substitute a narrative of my own device for the dialogue of tenants and to interpret my observations through an unacknowledged interest in the research outcome. Similarly, my role working for a tenants’ organisation and providing resources for tenant mobilisation would have enabled me to adopt a strategy of action research, and this could have represented a process of empowerment for tenants’ organisations and been presented as integral to a strategy of movement mobilisation (Todhunter 2001). Adopting this approach would be to assume that there existed a tenants’ movement that could be informed, with aims that could be shaped and would attribute value to the findings while disingenuously presenting the research as something tenants had initiated. The researcher would become the facilitator of a movement and the research would facilitate the outcome to be studied. In adopting this circuitously interventionist model, the researcher might take as a cautionary example those community workers who saw themselves as ‘not directing’ the tenant struggles they had theorised into existence, while admitting in practice that they found direction to be far more effective (Mayo 1972, Twelvetrees 1982).

While no criticism of ‘critical change’ methodologies is intended (Patton 2002), this research must avoid the tendency of speaking for, rather than listening to tenants and it seeks to apply high standards of reflexivity about the choices and decisions taken throughout the study. The opportunities for unacknowledged
researcher bias are not confined to action research or participant observation, and the researcher’s frame of reference, personal characteristics and role-relations with the research participants can all impact upon the trustworthiness of the data in the course of moderating focus groups and conducting interviews (Lincoln & Guba 1985). My concern for authenticity and for the credibility of data drew on traditional scientific research criteria in its focus on the inquirer and I was particularly concerned about data of interest that emerged only at the elicitation of the researcher (McCall 1969). In the use of focus groups and semi-structured interviews I aimed to achieve the transfer in power from the researcher to the participant that Sue Wilkinson (1999) argued could be gained in allowing the participants to elaborate their own themes and agendas. In each of the 12 focus groups conducted in this research the direction of the discussion was influenced by the relationships among the participants and by their conversational responses, although I returned to the fixed questions when the discussion appeared to have reached some conclusion. I paid particular attention to the so-called ‘back channels’ provided by the moderator’s role in the focus group: the affirmative comments, ‘yeah, okay, sure’, or the supportive sounds and gestures, ‘Mmm, Uh-huh’, the nods of the head, that guide the participants and can influence the content of speech acts and the direction of conversation. The development of new frames of discussion in the focus groups meant that I had to respond as moderator with secondary questions to explore ambiguous remarks or to encourage reflection or further deliberation. Aware that these interventions could be interpreted as guidance or direction, I began to restrict back channel response and to refrain from prompts or secondary questions, tolerating moments of silence as necessary to the development of deliberation and frame construction by the group.

Accounts in both interviews and focus groups were evaluated throughout for their consistency and the comparison of data from focus groups and interviews enabled some triangulation of data sources, and provided evidence of the construction and assemblage of collective contentions from individual narratives. The analysis of three frames set out in Chapters 6 and 7 was reported back to a group of research participants (focus group 11 in Table 2) to provide an additional opportunity for triangulation. While recognising these frames and engaging in further amplification of the content, the participants then initiated a defensive discussion about obstacles to tenant mobilisation (for context see discussion of apathy in Chapter 8). They appeared to treat the voices of tenants
in other focus groups and interviews not as those of fellow participants and activists, but to perceive them as ‘outsider’ voices that intended some criticism of their own organisational efforts and effectiveness. A one page summary of the main findings of this study was sent to all the research participants whose contact details were available in order to thank them for their involvement and to indicate the outcome of the study. The response from one tenants’ federation was to ask for the full report, so that they could distribute it to their tenant organisations and discuss and draw conclusions from its findings; another federation asked me to attend their annual general meeting to report my results. If Spivak’s (1988a) definition of the subaltern can be applied to the tenants’ movement then this research has inevitable limitations: in attempting to depict a tenants’ movement that can be discerned and researched, this study must substitute a historical actor in the place of the subaltern. This actor may be unrecognisable to its subaltern self; it appears as an external agent and may itself become a force for domestication. John Beverley (2005: 554) explained:

‘Spivak is trying to show that behind the gesture of the ethnographer or solidarity activist committed to the cause of the subaltern in allowing or enabling the subaltern to speak is the trace of the construction of an other who is available to speak to us (with whom we can speak or with whom we would feel comfortable speaking), thus neutralising the force of the reality of difference and antagonism to which our own relatively privileged position in the global system might give rise. She is saying that one of the things being subaltern means is not mattering, not being worth listening to, or not being understood when one is “heard”’.

In adopting a research strategy that aimed to transfer power from the researcher to the participant (Wilkinson 1999), it was not possible for the researcher to detach himself from the research and, inevitably, questions that encouraged deliberation on strategy, and particularly those that pursued understandings of a ‘tenants’ movement’ steered participants towards responses that met the research goals. However, the exercise of withholding affirmative comments, and particularly the willingness to wait through momentary silences to encourage further deliberation, did yield data of considerable interest. Similarly the decision not to intervene when group discussions developed into disagreement between individual participants gained significantly rich research
data and it was in analysis of these recorded discussions that negotiation on strategy and distillation of common cause could be most readily discerned. If this research strategy inevitably fails to present the subaltern in a form recognisable to itself, it has been successful to the extent that the subaltern has at least spoken, and if this work fails to avoid a misrepresentation of its participants, it is not because ‘the reality of difference and antagonism’ (Beverley 2005: 554) has been ignored. This study is a construction, an interpretation of the data by a partial and privileged researcher, but it is one that has been inspired and informed by participants who are subjects in their own right, and who may or may not be engaged in their own construction of a tenants’ movement.

Analytical frameworks

The analytical framework for this research draws on two approaches that foreground the processes of identity work in discourse and provide both macro and micro strategies to interpret the identity talk of tenants in interviews and focus groups. These approaches are frame analysis and positioning theory. Frame analysis has developed as the methodology to deconstruct and evidence the construction of collective identity frames and has over 100 movement-specific studies to its name. It asserts its ability to lay bare the concepts that lie inside the ‘black box of mental life’ through an assessment of the accumulated meaning of individual voices (Johnston 2002: 63). Positioning theory (Harré & Langehove 1999) is a method of conversational analysis that tracks and examines the reproduction of social categories and the iteration and contestation of identities in dialogue. It points to the attribution of positions that takes place within conversation where sets of assumed rights and duties are conveyed within story lines, and serve to limit the possibilities of action, or provide permissions to act.

Positioning theory provides a microanalysis of identity talk with its focus on the construction processes engaged in conversation and allows observation of how identities are ‘done’ and ‘re-done’ in Judith Butler’s theorisation. For Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger (2003: 158) power and oppression are ‘processes continually created and sustained (and sometimes resisted) through the
practices of cultural members in interaction.’ These processes can be interpreted as positions, relational positions assumed in dialogue that attribute people to social categories, allocate them presumptive characteristics, and impose an order on conversational exchange in which access to rights and duties are permitted, denied or contested. ‘People can adopt positions, strive to locate themselves in positions, be pushed into, be displaced from or be refused access to positions all in a highly mobile and dynamic way’ (Harré & Moghaddam 2003: 5). As a method of conversational analysis, positioning theory begins by making hypotheses about the speech act that participants construct, seen as chosen from a range of dialogic genres, and proceeds to make deductions about the positions taken in that act. It starts from the assumption that all narrative collaborations draw on knowledge of sedimented social structure understood as a set of roles that can be allocated, and participants in dialogue assume identificatory characteristics and collude in the attribution of meanings to categories (Davies & Harré 1999). Positioning is a dynamic process of analysis and interrogates conversation according to first and second order positioning, where the first act is to claim and attribute positions within a recognisable story line, and the second is to either refuse the attribution or to question or renegotiate the storyline; both strategies involve expressions of identity, references to agency, value judgements, and biographical citation. The negotiation of position is a relation of power in dialogue in which consensus can be constructed or imposed, social order reproduced or amended and meanings reiterated or transformed (Harré & Langenhove 1999).

In analysing focus group discourse or individual narrative, positioning theory is applied in this study to evidence the processes of identity contestation and negotiation through detailed examination of the texts, and to test the theorisation of identity work in the tenants’ movement. Focus group deliberations and semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed in detail, using a conversational analysis transcription key based on that used by the positioning theorists Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger (2003), and set out in Table 3. Where a conversational exchange illuminates identity construction the text is presented in full, with deviations, hesitations, and repetitions included as they were transcribed, and the moderator’s questions and interventions are included to set the responses in context and to foreground the role of the researcher in potentially guiding the framing processes. Even when conversation is not
analysed in detail, excerpts are transcribed in full to limit the mediating role of the researcher and to maintain textual integrity.

**Table 3: Transcription Key**
(based on Wilkinson & Kitzinger 2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[]</th>
<th>Square brackets</th>
<th>Overlapping talk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>=</td>
<td>Equals sign</td>
<td>No space between turns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.5)</td>
<td>Time in round brackets</td>
<td>Intervals within or between talk measured in seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(.)</td>
<td>Period in round brackets</td>
<td>Discernable pause or gap too short to measure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>::::</td>
<td>Colons</td>
<td>Extension of preceding sound (the more colons, the greater the extension)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Dash</td>
<td>Abrupt cut off of sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>here</td>
<td>Underlining</td>
<td>Emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HERE</td>
<td>Capitals</td>
<td>Loudness, relative to surrounding talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%here%</td>
<td>Percentage sign</td>
<td>Quietness relative to surrounding talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£</td>
<td>Pound sign</td>
<td>Smile voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Laugh)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Full laugh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(h)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Laughter particle inserted into talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hhh.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Audible out-breath (number of ‘h’s indicates length)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.hhh</td>
<td></td>
<td>Audible in-breath (number of ‘h’s indicates length)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( )</td>
<td>Empty round brackets</td>
<td>Transcriber unable to hear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bring)</td>
<td>Word(s) in round brackets</td>
<td>Transcriber uncertain of hearing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>((sniff))</td>
<td>Word(s) in double round brackets</td>
<td>Sounds with transcriber’s comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[…]</td>
<td>3 periods in square brackets</td>
<td>Material omitted for presentational purposes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Frame analysis begins from a coding of the areas of agreement evidenced in the focus group discussions or supported in individual narratives. It therefore serves as a macro level of analysis and addresses the construction of collective identity frames and the convergence of reflective experience and opinion, the process of accenting meaning and bridging or aligning established discourses to articulate a set of statements that comprise the expression of the tenants’ movement. Frames are interpretive tools that help interacting individuals understand the process they are engaged in by reference to something already familiar and they provide a recognisable reference point, a known structure and meaning for making sense of new and uncharted territory (Donati 1992). They are built up through tiers of sub-categories grouped in a hierarchical cognitive structure, held individually, and shared and organised collectively: snap-shots of identity construction representing a process of interpretation rather than a fixed framework. Hank Johnson (1995: 237) argued for the analysis of what he called frame nodes within this hierarchical structure, a category that purposely recalls Ernesto Laclau and Chantel Mouffe’s dissection of hegemony around nodal points. The higher level nodes in the frame hierarchy express concentrations of shared meaning that co-ordinate and interpret the common experiences of participants while those nodes at lower levels in the structure indicate more idiosyncratic expressions that are packaged within frame alignment to support the concentrated higher-level meanings. Frame analysis appears to offer a route into the ‘identity convergence’ problem (Stoecker 1995), offering a verifiable method of deciphering the elements of individual identity frames and charting the process by which those individuals come together as members of social movements to share and order their senses of self in the construction of a collective identity. The challenge is to convincingly demonstrate these theoretical interpretations of cognitive processes and to maintain a firm and verifiable link from the concept to the empirical observation. In their study of protest campaigns in Germany, Jürgen Gerhards and Dieter Rucht (1992) depicted the construction of collective action frames in a diagrammatic analysis borrowed from Robert Axelrod’s (1976) mapping of decision-making processes as hierarchic schemata, using a graphic design of points and arrows to investigate the internal structure of frames. This allowed them to present an overall description of a master frame and to display the subordinate elements making up that frame, visually representing its detailed content and the relationships involved in the discourse. Verification can be demonstrated by
annotating each node in the frame with the line of text it was drawn from, or with the number of respondents holding to each sub-category (Johnston 2002).

A similarly comprehensive approach to frame analysis is pursued in the research strategy for this study, firstly refining the coding categories that appear to be expressed as frames in focus group discussion, secondly applying those codes to the body of the text of focus groups and interviews to anatomise the frame hierarchy, and finally presenting key frames of the tenants’ movement diagrammatically in order to illustrate the outcomes of identity work. The transcripts were coded across 14 categories: five framing codes were identified from areas of agreement appearing in the majority of interviews and focus groups, another five were suggested by the taxonomy of identity work processes that guided the research, while the theoretical framework provided a matrix for four textual groupings that allowed conversational exchanges and narrative excerpts to be tagged under such keywords as ‘recognition’ and ‘regulation’ rather than codes that have been more fully explored such as ‘reasons for participation’ (see for example Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995, Birchall & Simmons 2004, Simmons & Birchall 2006). These coded research findings were applied to uncover three central collective action frames that construct the common interests, values and beliefs of the tenants’ movement, and additional frames around boundary marking, mobilisation and strategy. In keeping with the frame analysis process outlined by Hank Johnson (2002) the percentage of focus groups and interviews in which these frames were constructed has been stated in each case. This approach is unusual in a qualitative study, and the intention is not to claim a spurious authority for these frames, but to clarify their significance within the sample, and evidence their identification and interpretation, a task also served through the diagrammatic representation of the internal structure of the three frames and their annotation with quotations from the research sample.

This chapter has set out a research strategy to analyse the identity talk of tenants engaged in participation with social housing organisations. It has established a matrix of identity work processes grounded in the social movement concepts of collective identity and collective action frames that can be tested by the research. It has assembled a sampling strategy around a definition of the ‘tenants’ movement’, marshalled according to geographic range and strategic intention, and set out methods of data collection based on focus
group discussion and semi-structured interview. Finally an analytical framework employing positioning theory and frame analysis has been presented to allow the research findings to be interrogated at micro and macro levels to explore the construction of collective identity as the assertion of a tenants’ movement. The next chapter begins this journey of discovery. The near extinction of the tenants’ movement in accounts of housing policy after the 1980s can be traced back to their engagement in participation with their landlords. It appears that participation offers tenants a glimpse of opportunities to bring about change in power relations. However, it is equally clear that participation is a regulated process that recruits tenants into governance. To rediscover the contemporary tenants’ movement it is necessary to begin by exploring the paradoxical dynamics of identity that are central to tenant participation.
Chapter 5
The Recognition and Subjection of Tenants

Stephanie is a tenant director of a social housing company formed in a stock transfer from her local authority. She is very positive about the value of tenant participation and the role it plays in her organisation. The Chief Executive Officer of her housing company has let her know she can call in anytime; her Director of Operations asked her to draw up the organisation’s first tenant participation strategy, and nine years later, that document still forms the basis of the company’s way of working. She feels she is, finally, being treated as an equal. Stephanie says:

I mean with us, I think it’s about attitude and the attitude is, I mean, it’s a consultation, its, I feel when I walk in that company I am on the same level as the housing staff and anybody else. I’m not any better, I’m not any worse, I’m not patronised.

The difference between her old Council landlord and the new stock transfer company for Stephanie is that now tenants receive the respect they deserve. Comparing her current Director of Operations with the Council officers who were formerly in charge, she says:

He knows that decisions that are made and things that happen do impact directly on people’s lives, so he tends to be very easy to talk to and he’s quite willing to listen.

For Stephanie this demonstrates the recognition accorded tenants in her organisation and evidences that the values of tenant participation run through the company from the bottom to the top. The recognition Stephanie feels she receives from the senior managers seems to epitomise everything that tenants wanted in their original desire for participation in housing services. The desire for recognition is key to the identity of the tenants’ movement as it emerges through the public policy of participation.
This chapter begins to analyse the identity work of tenants involved in formal participation with their social housing providers. It critically explores their understanding of the power relations of participation and examines the processes of identification that entail. It is argued here that the identities constructed by tenants in participation and the identifications imposed upon them are central to the formation of a tenants’ movement. Working within Judith Butler’s framework, this chapter theorises tenant participation as the interpellation of social housing tenants; a process of recognition that establishes a tenants’ movement and constitutes its members as regulated subjects. Participation offers tenants rights of citizenship and promises to overturn their stigmatised status to award them equality. This citizenship is conveyed through an interpellation of tenants as consumer-citizens, or rational subjects gifted with the ability to choose, and endowed with the civil rights associated more traditionally with property-ownership. It is presented in the salience it awards to a contractual relationship in which the tenant appears as an equal party, deeded with the right to negotiate binding agreements. This citizenship conveys too, a political subject who participates in democratic decision-making and who is capable of self-government, and of exercising political judgement over questions of public good, who is therefore the bearer of political rights, and the inheritor of a legacy of rights-claims and battles for equality. In promising release from the stigma of the welfare recipient that mires the identification of social housing tenant, this citizenship appears to offer the status of a civilised being, the possessor of social heritage, or a full member of society (Marshall 1950). The recognition conferred in this manner by tenant participation is transformative in that it enables claims to be made on universal rights and initiates the contentious possibilities of a social movement. But participation also restates the submission expected of tenants and re-imposes the debilitating label of stigma. Participation serves as a repetitive and continuous process of identity construction in which a social movement is enabled and disarmed.

First the chapter analyses the complex impact of interpellation in the conflict between stigma and equality experienced by social housing tenants. It argues that participation has become a rights-claiming strategy that offers tenants the vista of a new subjectivity that simultaneously reinforces the negative identity of their status. The chapter then turns to examine participation as a hegemonic discourse and charts the foreclosure of meaning and the restriction of boundaries in the service of a particular power relationship. Ideas of democracy
and collective action that once supported the concept of a tenants’ movement are excluded in this hegemonic definition of participation. The identificatory project to construct tenants in a regulated image is explored through the case of tenant directors of social housing companies and the chapter concludes with an example of how excluded identities may be reclaimed in their potential to breach the hegemonic foreclosure of participation and to enable the evolution of a tenants’ movement.

**Equal citizens?**

In Althusser’s concept of interpellation, an individual is granted social recognition only by obeying a call to order from the law. Until this reprimand, the individual is not a social subject; not a citizen. Judith Butler (1993: 121) explains this:

> ‘The subject not only receives recognition, but attains as well a certain order of social existence, in being transferred from an outer region of indifferent, questionable, or impossible being to the discursive or social domain of the subject.’

Interpellation denotes a process of identification in which identity is conferred and contested, a subject is constructed and subjectivity enabled. In Althusser’s interpellation it is the policeman who calls ‘you there’; for tenants it was the policy of participation. They were hailed as rights-bearing citizens with the promise of equality, in T.H Marshall’s (1950) definition, while being domesticated in a regulatory framework. Their involvement in participation establishes tenants as a social movement; in the same moment it brands them as both subject and subjected.

The development of participation, and particularly the way in which it has been driven through the social housing sector by government policy and regulation, has brought tenants from Butler’s (1993: 121) ‘outer region of indifferent, questionable, or impossible being’ to a position where their views are actively canvassed, and they can sit as potential equals on their landlord’s management board. Gina, a committee member of one of the regional tenants’ federations says:
Tenants are equal, it’s equal rights, equal citizens and that’s how it should be continued to be looked at. We’re just as equal as anybody else, we’re still people, we’re still humans.

This heart-felt message is echoed in the title of the report that gave life to the National Tenants Voice *Citizens of Equal Worth* (NTV Project Group 2008b), and the sentiment is expressed by tenants across this research study, sometimes phrased in terms of desire for a level playing field, or wanting social landlords to ‘understand what it’s like from our position’ and ‘be honest and open with us’. This longing for recognition as an equal citizen may be the passion that drives Gina to travel miles across country on buses and trains to voice her concerns about her housing service, but her equal status is conditional on her participation. It is granted to her only in the process of participating, and if she decides not to take part in her landlord’s consultation processes, she returns to the status of passive welfare recipient. She becomes again the object of disciplinary discourses intended to modify her behaviour and can no longer command the identification of the active citizen, possessor of equal status and manipulator of civil and political rights.

Christine, a member of a tenant management organisation, appreciates that the way tenants are treated has improved, but she is aware that there are limits to this progress.

I just feel myself personally that you’re not at the bottom of their list anymore. You’re not an equal – we’ll never be an equal – but I think it’s for the better that we are able to come over and speak to them and not be belittled.

As Susan, another regional tenants’ federation member says:

The simplest way to describe it is if tenants don’t engage with the landlord, then effectively what happens is things get done to them, whether they like it or not. And if they do engage then they can have some say in what the things are.
It is the constant reminder of their otherwise abject status that inspires tenants to engage with a process that even at worst, is better than the alternative. The positioning of social housing as the tenure of last resort was formalised in the Housing Finance Act 1972, and dramatically realised through the 1980 Housing Act and the Right to Buy. Leached of its best stock and most affluent tenants, social housing became intended as a safety-net for those who were reliant on welfare (Card 2001). The size of the social housing sector declined sharply during the 1990s and 2000s through sales and demolition, while new social house building was maintained at a very low rate; even when public investment was made available by the New Labour government it was limited to patching up the damage done to the existing council stock under the Conservatives to achieve the ‘decent homes standard’, rather than increase the number of homes (Malpass 2005). Social housing became characterised as intrinsically valueless; the carrier of deprivation, poverty and worklessness (Dwelly & Cowans 2006), while an injection of middle income homeowners became seen as the cure for the reputed ills of this tenure and its areas of deprivation (Burgess 2007). In housing policy discourse the concept of the mixed community has become a short-hand for the stigmatisation of social housing, and estates with high levels of anti-social behaviour or suffering from marginal demand have been demolished to make way for new homes at full market price and for low cost home ownership (Manzi 2010).

Jane, an articulate and thoughtful member of a regional federation, remembers when a council tenancy was a symbol of social mobility and has watched the social status of tenants debased. She charts the decline:

I think the press and the politicians definitely try and make out that we’re all a load of scroungers who don’t work. And of course, their policy over the last few years, the last twenty, thirty years since they stopped building council houses, has allowed them to create that sort of situation because the only people who get housed now are the desperate, you know, who have to live on housing benefit in order to qualify to get a council house. Of course historically that’s not been the case and I come from the generation where you actually were considered one step up if you lived in a council house, because you had a decent home.
The concentration of people on very low incomes, often outside the active labour force, in one easily demarcated housing sector has allowed social housing to become a proxy for Government strategies that adopt the concept of empowerment as the cure for welfare dependency (Somerville 2005a). While home ownership and consumption have become synonymous with responsible citizenship under New Labour & Coalition governments, tenants find themselves relegated to the status of flawed consumers whose citizenship is contingent (Bauman 1998), and they remain subject to a range of disciplinary discourses and intensive management processes that are the consequence of their position in the housing market (Clapham, Franklin & Saugeres 2000, Flint 2006).

With citizenship defined by home ownership, the participation of tenants grants them only limited recognition. By participating in housing management they display responsibility, but their tenure serves as an indelible mark of dependence. The experience of stigma, received through attitudes, behaviours and policies, is common to social housing tenants today; a factor identified by every tenant in this study. A stigmatised identity provides the motive for participation and the enduring enactment in media representation and government policy of this stigma ensures that participation becomes for tenants a repetitive activity, an unending iteration that promises recognition but never fully delivers. To paraphrase Alice’s Red Queen, it takes all the participation they can do to stay in the same place, as this reflection among tenants at a TPAS conference makes clear:

Yvonne: We haven’t changed the popular image
Clare: Not of council tenants
Yvonne: Not for the politicians and people that think they matter
Linda: Those who think they know everything
Wendy. Hmm
Clare: Certain individuals may belong to criminality but, um, I still say we’re stigmatised
Linda: Oh yes
[....]
Yvonne: And the connotations of the word social because the first thing you think of social is you’re [on the dole]

Clare: [You’re on the social]

Yvonne: You’re on income support

Wendy: You’re a skiver, yes, you’re a skiver.

Yvonne: Meaning you’ve never worked in your life

The representation of ‘council’ estates as crime-ridden places and of social housing tenants as morally deviant has been catalogued extensively (see Card 2001, Flint 2006, Johnston & Mooney 2007), and stories of these supposedly dysfunctional families have enlivened film and television fiction and documentary journalism. Cheryl reflects on this in a focus group at the TPAS conference:

In the media we’ve all got burned out old cars and washing machines in our gardens; we’re the local people that everyone hates.

A survey respondent at the same conference asserted:

I am a council tenant and proud but I’m treated as a lower class person because social housing tenants are all unemployed, uneducated, single parents, have problem children and so on. Social housing equals social workers equals on the social equals benefits equals deprivation equals crime.

Attempts to transform these imagined welfare tenants into rational consumers by instituting choice in lettings or, through stock transfer, choice of landlord have dominated housing policy for the last two decades, but for Paul, a member of a tenants’ panel, this free market language merely underlines the sense of prejudice:

You feel like a beggar some time and as a beggar you have no choice, because if they subsidise your rent, then you’ve not much to say. Beggars can’t be choosers, some people say that.
These representations of stigma in housing policy and the media are made concrete through the management practices of housing organisations. The moral discourses prevalent in housing management have gained definition through new policy imperatives (Haworth & Manzi 1999). Anti-social behaviour initiatives have positioned housing management as the governance of behaviour (Flint 2006), while the engagement of housing companies in ‘worklessness’ programmes, following John Hills’ (2007) report has sharpened the focus on the sector as a warehouse for the poor. For Pauline Card (2006: 54) ‘all council tenants have become perceived as irresponsible, workshy and undeserving’. These discourses are manifested in the attitudes of housing staff and for this group of tenant managers constituted the primary reason they took over the running of their own estate:

Jean: They used to speak to you as though you were
Christine: God yeah
Gary: Yeah
Jean: Dog muck under their feet.

Tenants engaged in participation may experience recognition from the senior management of a housing organisation while they receive more traditional treatment from operational staff, an experience that Elizabeth expresses graphically in group discussion:

We have more problems with front-liners than we ever had up at the top, because a lot of them when you go into the offices they still look as if, well, have you just come off their shoe.

The current primacy of discourses of social control in housing organisations is partnered by the rise of a ‘big business’ orientation (Self 1993) in their governance driven by new public management directives and the obligations imposed by private sector lending (Darcy & Manzi 2004). Tenants in the present study believed that commercial values dominated the decision-making of housing authorities and they characterised members of their governing bodies as ‘business people’. Stephanie described her board:
You've got eight business people who will sit there and look shear just at
the business which is great if you’re in a bank and you’re looking at profits
but when you’re looking at people, that there are people in these decisions
you’re making.

The perception that commercial judgements are the guiding force in housing
companies reinforces feelings of lack of worth among participants in the
research. Tenants are seen as commodities, Mina asserts at a tenants’
federation discussion:

That means they are there to make money from. Regardless of whether
they are housing association tenants or council tenants, at the end of the
day, how much can they get from your house without breaking the bank
and not paying much to contractors and getting profit from that particular
house? That’s what they are looking for in the end.

The identification of tenants as ‘second-class citizens’ appears at odds with the
dynamics of equality and citizenship that power the interpellative call of
participation. The abject identification that inspired tenant demands for
participation remains a constant accompaniment to their contemporary
involvement in housing management to the extent that it appears to be a product
of that interpellative call. For Judith Butler (1993: 122) interpellation is to be
understood as a disciplining call or reprimand delivered by the force of law. ‘The
reprimand does not merely repress or control the subject, but forms a crucial
part of the juridical and social formation of the subject,’ she explains. Through
interpellation, Butler theorises that the subject is inaugurated as an effect of the
discourse that precedes and enables it. The recognition inherent in the act of
participation inducts tenants into the subject status that conditioned their
demands for participation. It affirms them as problematic and conditional citizens
and cements this identity as the essential quality of being a social housing
tenant. In other words, interpellation requires that tenants act in the ways in
which they are already described. Their very intelligibility, the social recognition
that they seek, depends on their reiteration of the norms of this identification.
The engagement of tenants in the public policy of participation equates with
Althusser’s (1971: 118) ‘one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion’,
the about-turn of the man called to order by the law. In order to be recognised in
their claim to citizenship, tenants must first accept that they are not and never can be citizens.

This is a message that tenants hear loud and clear as this extract from a discussion among members of local residents’ groups shows:

Greta: Well we’re all sort of, you’re tarred with the same brush aren’t you? You are, you’re a tenant and that’s it
Bob: And we’re all sinking in the same boat.
Greta: Yeah
Bob: ((Laughs))
Jane: And we’ve all got to fight for what =
Greta: And you’ve got to fight for what you want
Bob: Yep
Greta: And we shouldn’t have to fight
Edna: Shouldn’t be postcode either
Deirdre: That’s life isn’t it?

In this dialogue tenants recognise their exclusion from citizenship and, in identifying this as an injustice done to them, proceed to make a claim on the concept of universal rights. In resolving to fight for their rights, they reference the traditional mode of claimants and articulate themselves in a history of rights-claiming movements. They have no entitlement to occupy the place of citizens ‘but nevertheless demand that the universal as such ought to be inclusive of them’ (Butler 2000: 39). Tenants are not readily included in the definition of citizens but that does not stop them having recourse to the term. In making a claim on a universal concept that excludes them they reveal its particularity and challenge its limitations. This claim to the rights of citizenship is articulated as a basic entitlement in the discourse of participation, evidenced by these members of a tenants’ panel.

John: A tenant is a tenant when all’s said and done. They pay their dues like everybody else
Kevin: But I think what it is, is we believe that all tenants deserve the same rights as anybody else.
In Butler’s theorisation, the interpellation of tenants into participation suggests ‘that conventional and exclusionary norms of universality can, through perverse reiterations, produce unconventional formulations’ and ‘mobilise a new set of demands’. Participation may have two paradoxical outcomes in this thesis: tenants will be ‘liberated into a new mode of subjection that the doctrine of citizenship has in store’, but the exclusionary identification of tenants ‘may find itself rendered conceptually riven precisely by the emancipatory claims it has made possible’ (Butler 2000: 40).

This contradiction at the heart of participation both reinforces and challenges existing relations of power. Tenants are interpellated as equal citizens, but that equality is negated by the fact that they are tenants. They are confronted with the possibility of equality that challenges their subordination in all other identifications. Chantal Mouffe (2000: 302) dubs this a contradictory interpellation:

‘A situation in which subjects constructed in subordination by a set of discourses are, at the same time, interpellated as equal by other discourses.’

It is a contradiction that allows tenants to question and to challenge their identity. The social recognition inherent in interpellation cannot then merely reproduce subjection; it constructs a new social subject. This makes the interpellative call of participation a revelatory and transformative moment for tenants and many in this research cited a particular occasion or circumstance when they glimpsed the possibilities they thought participation could offer. This epiphany may have been a moment when for them injustice came sharply into focus, but it was also a moment in which they felt motivated and inspired. This combination of subjection and subjectivity is integral to the identification of tenants through participation.

‘That changed me’ Ron said, describing the moment when he encountered what he describes as the tenants’ movement. It was at a meeting convened by his landlord to discuss housing transfer proposals. It was a moment of realisation:
It was a Sunday morning, I’ll never forget it, it was a Sunday morning, and we all sat round a table. I thought, it’s funny, we can have a say here, and change our way of thinking.

It was to launch Ron as a social movement activist; within weeks he was elected chair of a borough tenants' panel and, a year later, was one of the founders of a regional tenants’ federation.

Michael recounts a similar experience of Damascene conversion in his first encounter with a tenants’ federation engaged in participation.

I found it infectious. Um, that these, this small band of people were on this like mini-crusade to change the way the council were working and they were being restricted on every corner.

Neither Ron nor Michael believed that the participation process was likely to lead to any immediate improvements or that it would benefit them personally. Michael immediately concluded that his landlord had little interest in tenants’ views and was unlikely to take any suggestions on board. What attracted him, what possessed him at that moment was not a belief in dialogue or the power of ‘voice’. It was the suggestion that change was elusive but attainable.

We found it hard to walk away, you know, once you were in. It was, and it still is, its infectious, you know, and I think every little, sort of piece, every small victory still means something even now, you know, it can be just changing a line on a policy or a strategy but it still means something, to sort of, still putting our mark on things.

John saw a television documentary in which councillors ‘with clipped accents’ were talking about what was best for tenants. Looking back he identifies this as the moment that he became a housing campaigner who went on to become a director of the national tenants’ organisation. ‘It’s silly. Something simple like that,’ he said. Simple, but life changing; it was an interpellative call that initiated him into the tenants’ movement; that constructed a tenants’ movement for him. He says:
There is the class system, stigma, there is the majority of the ruling classes, the Oxford and Cambridge who govern and dictate the rules. So there will always be a ceiling where tenants are allowed to aspire to and they will. Once we reach that ceiling it’s up to the next generation of tenants to strive for even greater achievements.

Referring explicitly to a history of tenant struggles, John uses his awareness of subjection to construct a discourse of popular resistance.

People have fought long and hard to raise the profile of tenants and to ensure they get a fair crack of the whip from landlords whatever persuasion. And it’s about continuing the work done by previous members of our communities and honouring their achievements and developing on what bricks they put in place and growing the opportunities.

In these three accounts tenants were able to glimpse the possibilities of new directions on an occasion when they were also, and paradoxically, confirmed in their abject status. These were moments of epiphany in which they were able to question and to rearticulate an identity; ‘spots of time’, according to Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*, in which they were reminded of their exclusion from citizenship, and yet, simultaneously, directed to their power.

At the TPAS conference Maisie talks enthusiastically about her tenant management organisation. In taking over the running of their estate, she says that tenants are creating new definitions for themselves, new identities.

I still think there is that stigma attached to anyone who is in social housing as far as the media is concerned. But I think the very fact that tenants are managing the whole of this, this social housing, will raise the status because it makes everyone realise that we’re not fools, we’re not, you know, we’re not here to live on the government’s handouts or we’re not irresponsible people, we are intelligent, articulate, educated people and we can do for ourselves what the government and any other association has been doing.
Tenant participation has become a rights-claiming strategy for Maisie. It is a process in which tenants challenge a dominant and abject identification and carve for themselves a new and positive collective identity. The strategy they embark on is a journey into the rights of citizenship; they make claims on the equality and social heritage that characterise the legitimate bearers of rights. In challenging subordination, tenants seek to become citizens, or as Barbara Cruikshank (1999) has described it, subject-citizens, because citizenship is a process in which individuals are made capable of self-government, and participation is a discourse in which the identities of subjects are foreclosed. The next section explores the boundaries of participation and the effects of its hegemonic foreclosure.

The hegemony of participation

After a committee meeting, members of a tenants’ federation reflect on the benefits of participation. They identify four themes:

Sandra: You’ve got to talk to your landlord else you’ll get nothing

Bernard: You can also gain a certain amount of control over what happens on the estate. You don’t get the brown and black colours of front doors anymore.

Frank: You get respect as well

Bernard: You get an insight into what they’re planning and they also get an insight into how you think so it helps get rid of any bad feeling from the start

Participation presents itself in each of these aspects; it is a coercive, regulatory framework that impacts on power relations and appears to reward tenants with improved status, within the semblance of a partnership of shared interests. Participation has articulated the demands of a social movement to a discourse of welfare state reform that constructs tenant identities, defines the boundaries of what is achievable, and excludes those meanings and identifications that might conflict with its aims. This section interprets the contemporary field of tenant participation in England through Judith Butler’s (2000) concept of
‘foreclosure’ as the outcome of a regulatory project to establish norms and identities. Participation is a reiterative action that tenants must constantly do and redo in their quest for recognition. Yet it is a performative process that constructs the tenants it describes. In this process the potential meanings and outcomes of participation have been progressively narrowed, and the application of power has been increasingly concentrated, while those meanings and identifications that threatened antagonism have been excluded (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). In detailing the articulation of this hegemonic participation, this section focuses on excluded identifications because as Butler (2000: 158) argues ‘the articulation of foreclosure is the first moment of its potential undoing’.

Tenant participation has been one of the main vehicles for the restructuring of welfare state housing in England with the policy aim to spread the quasi-market forces of voice and exit throughout the regulated social housing sector (Hirschman 1970). The launch of the Tenant Services Authority as the new regulator of social housing organisations in late 2008 and the creation of a National Tenants Voice as a consumer watchdog organisation in 2010 appeared to announce a new phase in this restructuring process. The Tenant Services Authority was described by its Chief Executive, Peter Marsh as a consumer-centred regulator with a mission to drive up standards of service for all tenants in affordable housing, providing comparative information on landlord performance, and opening up the possibility that tenants could switch housing management suppliers. Marsh promised tenants that their views on performance would be made central to the business management of social housing (Marsh 2008). While this initiative appeared to put tenants at the heart of policy it clearly narrowed the definition of tenant participation to a relation between consumers and producers that aimed to improve the social housing service and appeared to signal the closure of debate over the trajectory of tenant participation in housing policy. The review of social housing regulation in 2010 (CLG 2010), on the abolition of the TSA by the Coalition Government, confirmed the conflation of tenant participation with consumer protection and established it incontestably as a matter of service standards, performance scrutiny and complaint. There is now a ‘common sense’ or an agreed way of doing things that defines tenant participation as a relationship between tenants and housing providers over standards and costs (Audit Commission 2004a). There is a shared belief that participation serves everyone’s interests and is the action of responsible parties (Flint 2004a; Paddison et al 2008). And there is an understanding that
participation takes place in a neutral zone in which the idea of antagonism or conflict has little place (Cooper & Hawtin 1998; Carr, Sefton-Green & Tissier 2001).

To understand this process of foreclosure, it is useful to apply Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s (1985: 113) theory of hegemony as a discourse that fixes the meaning of ‘floating signifiers’. Floating signifiers are ambiguous political concepts that are capable of supporting a multitude of interpretations and can be brandished by a variety of causes in the name of diverse identities. As Laclau (1977:167) noted, in an early influential article, the most divergent political movements lay claim to the same symbols. A dominant discourse uses these ambiguous signifiers to articulate other social groups into its hegemonic project and in so doing, offers itself as a universal metaphor for the particular demands of those groups (Laclau 1990: 64). Hegemony is achieved once the meaning of the floating concepts has been fixed around what Laclau and Mouffe call ‘nodal points’ (1985:112), the matrix of representation and authorised identities in which the interpellated subject is moulded. The policy of tenant participation is structured around a number of contested symbols that appear to speak directly to the concerns identified by tenants’ organisations during the period of struggle of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Concepts such as participation, empowerment and community control, that appeared as the main themes of the 2008 White Paper Communities in Control (CLG 2008: 12), can accommodate many different interpretations and offer the potential for a convergence between the claims of the tenants’ movement and the values advocated in the official discourse of participation. These entangled concepts drawn from a common source in democratic theory became the nodal points through which tenants’ ambitions were articulated into a hegemonic restructuring of public housing services. Though divergent views appeared almost immediately around each of these concepts, their contested meanings became fixed in the dominant discourse, and many of the positions and meanings pursued by tenants in participation were marginalised or excluded.

The hegemonic project to restructure social housing through participation has successfully articulated an assortment of democratic concerns, mutualist traditions, consumer rights and communitarian beliefs into a coherent discourse that has the breadth and depth to secure the commitment of tenants, housing providers, local authorities, consultants and regulators and the robust edge to
push forward a market-based reform programme. These strands appeared separate and distinguishable when Liz Cairncross et al (1997) from Glasgow University coined their influential appraisal of participation through three ideal landlord types: traditional, consumerist, or citizenship models. The traditional model was characterised as a managerialist strategy aimed at maintaining the acquiescence of tenants, the citizenship model acknowledged the collective action of tenants organisations, and the consumer model was one in which social housing was considered as a tradeable commodity and not the subject of political debate or collective action. Cairncross explained that consumerist housing organisations ‘pursue an individualist form of tenant participation as part of the establishment of market relations in council housing. Tenants are seen as customers and empowering tenants is viewed as being achieved through giving them the role of the consumer who is able to exercise market choice’ (Cairncross, Clapham & Goodlad 1997: 42). When Paul Hickman revisited the Cairncross typology in 2006 his analysis confirmed the prediction that the consumer model would become increasingly influential in tenant participation but argued that the three ideal types were no longer sufficient to conceptualise the complexity of tenant participation practices. The scope of participation had widened beyond the narrow landlord-tenant relationship and opportunities for involvement had opened in areas of management, policy and regeneration. The number of participants had grown and, against the trend, tenants’ organisations had retained a role in consumerist housing organisations, while landlords following the traditional model had also broadened their approach to participation. Despite this evidence of diversity and expansion, Hickman argued that the meaning and purpose of participation was now almost entirely defined through the traditional and consumerist models. Participation was no longer seen as an activity that had value in itself but rather as a mechanism for providing better housing management services. Definitions of participation as a process of empowerment and democracy, associated by Cairncross with the citizenship model, had been excluded from the dominant meaning. Landlords decided when, where and how tenants would be involved in their housing service and the unifying theme among landlords was ‘a desire to retain power and control over tenant participation’ (Hickman 2006: 222).

These twin snapshots of the development of tenant participation represented by the Glasgow study, conducted between 1987 and 1991, and Hickman’s source, the Sheffield Hallam study between 1998 and 2001 (Cole et al 2000, 2001) chart
a process of foreclosure. Over this period participation policy was centrally
 driven by the ‘exit’ strategies of the Conservative governments with their
 promotion of tenant management, and the introduction of compulsory
 competitive tendering for housing management as demunicipalisation strategies
 accompanying the Right to Buy (Gilroy 1998), and the New Labour
government’s pursuit of ‘choice and voice’, delivered through the escalation of
the stock transfer process promising citizen governance in housing
organisations, along with Tenant Participation Compacts and the Best Value
inspection regime. Peter Malpass (2005: 203) explained how these government
policies defined and narrowed the boundaries of participation:

‘The big strategic decisions about the future direction of social housing
have been made centrally, leaving tenants with the freedom to influence
the timing of change at a local level and a choice as to which of the
restricted list of (centrally defined) options to adopt.’

The aims, processes, and outcomes of what participation is understood to be
were refined and narrowed in the service of a particular power relationship.
Those meanings that had the potential to contest that relationship or did not
directly support it were marginalised or excluded outright. These discursive
frontiers set limits on what was accepted as participation, and what could be
achieved through its policy, and tenants are aware of them as defined boundary
lines, as this focus group discussion shows:

Julia: I think we are being listened to more, but I think there’s only so far
we can go and then once we kind of overstep their boundaries and they
just put the shutters on us

Terri: Yeah

Julia: That is, that’s the feeling that I get sometimes, I don’t know whether
[anybody else] =

Terri: [I agree] =

Julia: has the same feeling, you know, that while ever we’re saying what
they want to hear, uh, but the minute we start pushing against

Terri: Once we get to a strategic level (0.1) their views are =
Julia: And they put the shutters up=

Terri: We don't know what we're talking about=

Julia: Keep us at arms length

Despite the range of opportunities apparently open to tenants to influence housing decision-making, the Sheffield study found, as had the Glasgow research before it, that tenants were excluded from participation in certain areas of the landlord business. In the present study this was confirmed by tenants who had asked their landlords for influence over finance and rent setting, staffing issues, investment planning and contractor selection and reported the refusal with which their request had been met. Paul, a member of a tenant panel, noted:

There are some areas where they want to consult tenants. Some other areas they want to make the decisions and they won’t share the decisions.

Where tenants are given access to these decision-making realms they are sometimes unclear what influence they are being allowed. Terri recounts her involvement in the selection of a cleaning contractor. Along with fellow tenants, she interviewed the contractors and voted for the one judged best in quality, only to learn that their landlord had awarded the contract to the company with the cheapest bid. Another tenant at a TPAS focus group, Denise said she had been allowed to take part in the initial stage of staff recruitment but had not been given any role in decision-making:

I’ve been told that we have no say in the personnel structure and so it is up to them who they employ, how they monitor that employment and we are only involved in certain participation but certainly not that area

The contemporary definition of participation is the outcome of a performance management strategy initiated by the National Framework for Tenant Participation Compacts (DETR 1999), published as part of the Best Value regime mirrored for the housing association sector (Housing Corporation 1998), that became the basis for the inspection programme led by the Audit Commission’s Housing Inspectorate. Compacts embedded a managerial
interpretation of participation with their accent on performance indicators, audits and measurements of satisfaction (Flint 2004a); their focus on economy and efficiency drove the principles of public choice theory into the landlord relationship with tenants (Harries & Vincent-Jones 2001). As a result the Audit Commission’s (2004b) inspection methodology, their Key Lines of Enquiry, centred regulatory attention on the measurable impact of participation on housing service delivery to the exclusion of its acknowledged effects on social capital or community cohesion (Audit Commission 2004a). The role of participation was delimited to the benefits it accrued for housing organisations. John Flint (2004a: 897) captured this succinctly when he stated ‘the empowerment and increased autonomy of individual tenants is a method for further empowering the ability of housing agencies to govern successfully.’

At the TPAS conference, Cheryl reflected on the contemporary framework of participation:

It gives you a voice, but that’s all it gives you […] They want to close our housing office down and we’ve been through the consultation but they will do whatever they want to do anyway. They have to be seen to consult you, it’s a legal requirement, but they will move heaven and earth to do what they want to do anyway. So we’ve got a voice, but we haven’t got the power, if you know what I mean.

During a tenants’ federation discussion, Henry reflects that although his council was one of the first to agree a tenant compact, it is no longer driving participation through its housing service. He explained this as a process in which traditional power relations were being re-established:

It seems to me it’s getting watered down and very much ignored, particularly by housing offices and it seems like we’re going back to the old day when the tenant is the rubbish and the bloke up the Housing is the kingpin.

The introduction of Compacts at the end of the 1990s was associated with a readiness among landlords to characterise traditional tenants’ organisations as unrepresentative. Tenants told researchers they were being expected to make
their organisations ‘more democratic than the local authority itself’ in order to persuade their landlord to recognise them (Cole et al 2001: 18). Funding and recognition were withdrawn from some self-organised tenants’ organisations and landlord consultation forums established to replace them. Paul Hickman (2006) cited this as evidence of the desire of housing organisations to maintain control over the participation process while landlords justified it with scathing reference to ‘professional tenants’ and the ‘usual suspects’ (Millward 2005b).

Escalating this trend, the most significant element in the Audit Commission’s regulatory foreclosure of participation was the emphasis it placed on ensuring diversity in landlord consultation processes and its implied criticism of representative tenant organisations for failing to demonstrate that they reflected the make-up of their local neighbourhoods (Housing Quality Network 2002). Landlords were instructed to profile their ‘customers’ and to assess the success of their participation schemes in helping them tailor their services more effectively; no regulatory weighting was accorded to the recognition or support of tenants’ organisations, instead landlords were told to provide a ‘menu’ of involvement opportunities to enable individuals to voice their opinions through surveys, focus groups and panels (Audit Commission 2004a). Spurred on by the Audit Commission’s inspection methodology landlords took the opportunity to replace what were seen as ‘difficult’ tenants groups with ‘tame’ tenant sounding boards (Morgan 2006: 231), while more borough councils withdrew financial support from federated tenant organisations (Grayson 2007).

At a meeting of one of the regional federations, Susan charts the decline of the traditional network of borough tenants’ federations that once underpinned a democratic structure. Reeling off three examples of defunct tenants’ organisations, closed down because they opposed specific plans that their landlord was determined would be realised, she concludes:

And then you’ve got sort of borough wide tenants’ councils or housing panels or a variety of things, and some are kind of anyway much closer linked with the local authority but not necessarily any less feisty, yeah?

Contrary to the argument put forward by John Grayson (2007) that these new landlord-organised groupings should not be considered part of the tenants'
movement, Susan is keen to point out that the tenants recruited into these new processes share the same frames of reference as the autonomous federations that preceded them. But even if the tenants involved are no ‘less feisty’, the withdrawal of support from some self-organised tenants’ federations, paralleled by the ascent of market research techniques, appears to have undermined confidence in the effectiveness of participation. Ron, a member of a landlord-administered panel, confides:

Yeah well, experience is telling me, the longer I serve on these things, is that, is that landlords, is, uh, in actual fact, don’t want to listen to tenants. They think tenants are too critical of the landlord and they don’t want to participate with them, never mind this partnership.

In focus groups and panels the agenda is usually set by housing officers, and what is consulted on and what use is made of that consultation are matters controlled by the housing company. This has made transparent the imbalance of power in participation relationships and highlighted the foreclosure of meanings once associated with democratic theory, something noted in the following exchange from a regional tenants’ federation:

Teresa: And what frustrates me is, when they do have a consultation exercise, they don’t involve the tenants at stage one (1.0)

Andrew: Hmm

Teresa: They involve them at stage ‘the end’

Richard: Five ((laughs))

Teresa: And you know, and that’s what frustrates me, because us as tenants, we could change the way that thing goes, and I don’t think they like that.

Richard: No, they’ve already set their stall out

Teresa: Yes =

Richard: Which way they’re going and =

Teresa: They don’t want =

Richard: They don’t want to deviate up another path that could be better
The application of market research techniques by landlords accords with the identification of tenants as consumers and was endorsed by the housing regulator in 2010. Following the lead established by the Audit Commission, the Tenant Services Authority insisted that housing providers offer tenants ‘a wide range of opportunities to be involved’ (TSA 2010a: 20), and set out a menu of nine involvement processes that includes surveys, feedback forms, focus groups and customer panels. Mike Raco (2003) is not convinced by the arguments over representativeness and diversity that accompany this policy direction. Raco believes this approach has been adopted to wrest influence away from what are seen as politicised community activists, and, more manipulatively, to break-up local opposition to unpopular policies. Autonomous and self-determined tenants’ organisations are able to ‘formulate oppositional interpretations’ (Fraser 1997: 81) and devise ‘different norms and alternative values’ (Barnes et al 2003: 383). They speak of a tradition excluded from contemporary participation policy.

In what has been called ‘the supermarket model’ of social housing (Clapham & Satsangi 1992: 66), in which an idealised free market is referenced to support a package of managerialist reforms, autonomous tenants’ groups lend themselves to caricature as selfish interest groups disrupting the free exchange of goods and information (Barnes 1999). In this argument the un-organised individual tenant consumer is seen as legitimate, while the collective voice of tenants is excluded for allegedly pursuing a specific self-interested goal that is unrepresentative of the general interest of tenants. A definition of the purpose of tenant participation as integral to the business improvement of housing companies clearly frames this contention. It is the housing professional who defines what is legitimate and what is representative by controlling the meaning of participation or, as Nicholas Abercrombie (1994: 50) put it, ‘the authority of the producer is sustained by the capacity to define the meaning of the transaction.’ A model of participation in which service recipients are recruited as data sources so their experience and views can be harvested by the experts (Beresford 1988), reinforces the power of the landlord or housing provider (Milward 2005b).

In early 2010 the regulator, the Tenant Services Authority restored the use of the term ‘empowerment’ to describe the duty on housing providers to provide opportunities for tenant participation (TSA 2010a). While this guidance reflected
the New Labour Government’s familiar deployment of empowerment as a concept central to welfare reform (Marinetto 2003), the regulator consciously engaged the term to point to the mutual housing sector as trailblazers in participation (TSA & Audit Commission 2010: 7) stating: ‘empowerment implies a level of joint responsibility for services that does not usually exist outside the mutual sector’. The contentious nature of these references was illustrated in the response by some of the biggest landlords, the so-called G15 of London housing organisations, who called for ‘empowerment’ to be replaced by the term ‘involvement or engagement’ (TSA 2010b: 7). The big housing companies aimed to reassert a model of participation in which the landlord exerts the dominant role and tenants are marshalled according to their statistical and demographic qualities and the relevance, or acceptability, of their views to the business plans of the providers (Barnes et al 2003).

Tenants in this research study employed the notion of the ‘tick-box exercise’ to indicate the exclusion by housing providers of ideas of empowerment, democracy or challenge from the meaning of participation. Najinder, speaking at a discussion with a regional federation, said:

Our housing panels are more often a talk shop rather than a consultation or participation (.) so they just, the council just engages us where they want to, er, tick the box (.) They’ve done everything what they’ve decided upon, and they just come and do a presentation at a meeting and say we’ve consulted you, you di-didn’t ask us any questions, so it’s all done, so.

This theme is taken up by Jean reflecting on the reasons for her involvement in setting up a tenant management organisation:

When I went to these meetings I felt they were telling me what were going to be done, instead of asking us what we thought. And it was just a matter of, er, ticking a box.

Even the few tenants in this study who could discern benefits from their involvement in market research techniques applied the ‘tick-box’ metaphor to distance themselves from their landlord’s motives. Kevin says:
Being involved in all the sounding boards we have an input and we always, if there’s summat in that agenda what strikes home to my community, I’ll fetch a question up to do with my community and we have influenced a lot of things that come through […]. Whether it’s a tick box for them, for the Audit Commission, I don’t know, but in my opinion when we’ve gone, we are listened to.

Theresa, a federation member, expands the criticism implied in this discursive frame:

I think the landlords […] they’ve got like little sections of tenants that they know they’re going to get away with. You know, ticking the box, yes we, we’ve consulted on this. In fact they haven’t consulted, they took a piece of paper, they’ve said “right we’re doing this; we just want you to agree to it. You’ve agreed to it and that’s consultation.” I hate that. That’s dictation to me, it’s not consultation.

In different tenant discussions, and bubbling up in a rush of criticism, landlord participation techniques are characterised as partial, self-serving and fundamentally flawed.

Yvonne: They ring them up at the last minute, because they know quite a few people have got other commitments, so they’ll ring them that they know who don’t do anything all day, “we’ll send you a taxi, can you be here in three?” “Yeah I’ll be” and it’s just to fill, it’s just to fill a space and tick a box. They’ve fulfilled it; it looks as if they’ve done.

John: Taxied to, taxied from, and a nice cup of tea and a bun. It allows an organisation to put forward its good news. Does it allow an organisation to address the deeper concerns? No. Because the agenda is set by the organisation, it is focused on the organisation and the feedback is in a form that the organisation chooses.

Marion Barnes and colleagues (2003: 396) echoed the contentions of tenants in this research study when they criticised ‘the power of public officials to constitute the public in particular ways; ways that tend to privilege notions of a general public interest and that marginalise the voices of “counter-publics” in the dialogic
process.' This exertion of hegemonic power to define the horizon of intelligibility for tenant participation delineates ‘what is possible, what can be said and done, what positions may legitimately be taken, what actions may be engaged in’ (Norval 1996: 4).

Being realistic, being sensible

The practices of participation are identificatory projects that fashion social housing tenants according to a regulatory matrix. The foreclosure of meanings, of what is intelligible as participation, has excluded some identities, those that threatened disruption, and promoted others; cementing them through the rituals and regulations of accepted participatory practice. A witness to the formative beginnings of tenant participation in the 1970s, Nick Derricourt (1973) worried that tenant representatives would not have the skills to take part in the formal council committee meetings that were the first participation rituals. They would fail to read reports in advance and be unable to follow an agenda, as was duly witnessed (Craddock 1975). If they learned to participate effectively on these committees, however, Derricourt warned they would be co-opted into a different manner of behaviour and become ineffective as tenants’ representatives. Attempts to improve, regulate and discipline the behaviour of tenants have accompanied the development of participation and tenants have been constantly urged to become something other, while criticised for not staying the same.

The development of the ‘expert tenant’ trained to fulfil the requirements of government participation policies was charted by Liz Millward (2005b). The statutory imposition of compulsory competitive tendering on housing management services, the regulatory demand for tenant scrutiny boards and tenant inspectors, and the conditions for establishing tenant management organisations have all meant tenants undergoing training to achieve certain defined ‘competencies’. These training programmes aim to steer tenants towards a suitable image of identity as the rational citizen-consumer (Furbey, Wishart & Grayson 1996). The inculcation of expertise among a minority of tenants has run parallel with the decline in status granted to the experiential knowledge of tenants’ organisations. The focus group and customer panel incorporate an amateur disposition among tenants who are asked only to
provide the housing professional with their personal experience and opinions to be sampled, quantified and filed (Millward 2005b). For tenants to be seen as legitimately ‘expert’ they must identify themselves with housing professionals and not tenant representatives. They must be trained to be expert in the ways of another identity.

This insistence on training before tenants can take up opportunities of participation has been essential to the construction of routes of collective ‘exit’ and ‘voice’ over three decades and tenants have been eager to learn so that they can be allowed to converse as equals with their landlords. They know that experiential knowledge is little valued in the strategic management of housing organisations and they are prepared to accept that their language and behaviour must be regulated if they are to make themselves understood by decision-makers. That is why training has become ‘a crucial priority’ for tenants who seek ‘effective participation’ (Wishart & Furbey 1997: 202), as Michael reflects:

All the time it was like we’ve got to find out more, we’ve got to find out more, you know, ‘cause they want, everybody wanted to challenge but if you don’t know what you’re challenging, then you’re just making a fool of yourself, so it was like a, all the time it was like a thirst for information, you know, you’d all get little tasks, read up on this and read up on that, you didn’t understand half of it so it was really, really very difficult.

The identificatory demands of participation have been most visible in governmental strategies for the promotion of citizen governance in housing organisations (Simmons et al 2007). Tenants currently make up over 18 per cent of directors on the boards of English social housing organisations, and hold at least one third of directorships in the new stock-transfer companies and arms-length management organisations (Cairncross & Pearl 2003, Ipsos Mori 2009a). When they become directors of social housing companies tenants assume a regulated identity defined in statute, and the Companies Act 1985 and 2006 sets out their duty to act in the best interests of the company. Tenants take on a corporate identity in which all board members are assumed to be equal and all are tasked with the same aims and interests, predicated on the assumption that the power relations that reproduce inequality and injustice stop at the boardroom door. As the tenant chair of Bolton Homes, an arms-length management
company, said: ‘We don’t like to be called tenant directors, we are all equal on the board’ (Ellery 2008).

Tenant directors, however, are a demographically distinct group on the management boards of housing companies and appear to adhere to a specific set of values. Research by Liz Cairncross and Martyn Pearl (2003) showed that their fellow governors are drawn from the ranks of highly educated, male professionals who are employed in senior management roles, and are likely to serve as directors for a range of companies and to operate as a local network of governance (Stoker 2004). When they enter the board room tenants are required to adopt the behaviour of directors who are demographically and culturally ‘Other’. The identity that tenants are supposed to assume is the image of a director, reflected not in their own person but in the persona of the highly educated professional board member. As Homi Bhabha (1994: 64) said: ‘It is the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image.’ Tenant directors see the image of their identity in the status and educational attainments of their fellow board members and define themselves, in comparison, through their failure to assume that image. Since they cannot attain the standards required to be a director, they remain for ever tenant directors, ‘almost the same, but not quite’ as Bhabha (1994: 123) maintained. As a representative of a cultural and business elite, the professional board member may be ‘not only the Other but also the Master’, to apply Frantz Fanon’s (1986: 138) colonial dialectic and the tenant is encouraged to mimic a symbol of domination as well as emulation. The tenant director fails to attain the image of identification and in failure, reinforces its subjection and reaffirms its difference.

Evidence of this failure of identification was provided by the Audit Commission in 2004 when it accused tenant directors of raising ‘estate-level issues’ at the board table to the exasperation of housing association chief executives (Audit Commission 2004b: 43). This accusation led the housing inspectorate to recommend that tenant board members should be selected by interview, rather than election, to ensure their future compliance with the requirements of governance. Since then tenant directors have mostly been recruited to board by interview and selected on the basis of their ability to make strategic judgements and articulate the language of governance. Tenants who want formal decision-making power in housing companies know they need to acquire a different and
higher value form of knowledge to fulfil their duties as directors. Stephanie and Karen, two tenant directors, understand there is no role for emotion or personal testimony in board-room deliberations.

Karen: It's all about doing your homework first.
Stephanie: Yes
Karen: It's no use going in there full of passion. If you've got no
Stephanie: Yeah
Karen: Reasoned argument
Stephanie: And that's the key to it, we will go in and we will be well prepared.

(0.2)
Stephanie: You can't just say "I want" you've got to back it up with a damn good reason why it's a need and not a want and sometimes they will say that's not very practical and there isn't the money but when the business plan's set for the next year, and we're looking at the tenant budget we will look at increasing that, and we'll put it in (.) and its, you've got to be realistic, you can't stamp your feet every time because they look..
Karen:  Umm
Stephanie: People will lose respect.
Karen: Yeah
Stephanie: You've got to be sensible. Not a word I'd use very often in connection with me

((general laughter))

Although presenting this with humour, Stephanie makes clear that she is not comfortable with the need to be ‘sensible’ or with the formal language she has to adopt at board. To influence housing decisions tenants have to learn the specialised language, jargon and acronyms used by professionals and argue their case dispassionately. This entails more than just learning to communicate in a different manner, it means acquiring a linguistic code that is the key to inequality and class distinction (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990). When they learn
the rules of participation as defined for tenant board members – the values of the company, the division between operational and strategic matters, the regulations of governance – tenants do not just absorb knowledge but with it the code used to convey that knowledge (Bourdieu, Passeron & St. Martin 1994). This code is a disposition towards language that is constructed by social class; it is linguistic capital and is intricately tied to the social relations through which it was created. To learn a linguistic code is to learn the requirements of its social structure (Bernstein 1970). A command of abstraction, logical syntax and complex conceptual hierarchies, along with accurate grammar, and the frequent use of impersonal pronouns have been identified as signs of the linguistic code of the dominant social groups (Bernstein 1973, Bourdieu & Passeron 1990). Tenant directors are asked to emulate these social groups, their fellow board members, and to acquiesce to the social structure that gave this linguistic code its prestige. In learning the keys to this language, tenant directors are in danger of losing the ability to communicate their own experience or to talk of the social relations that motivated them to seek a role in decision-making. It may be that the aspirations of tenants cannot be conveyed in a language that has been constructed by and for a very different set of social relations.

The construction of the tenant director produces a split subject, obliged to identify and to dis-identify at the same time. Tenants are recruited onto the boards of housing companies partly to legitimise the fragmented new landscape of stock transfer companies, arms-length management companies and merged and taken-over housing associations by rooting them in a defined sense of place and are often elected from defined constituencies (Flint 2003). The constituency model, which guarantees a third of board places for tenants alongside councillors and independents, and became the norm for stock transfer and arms-length management companies, was adopted partly as a response to the criticisms of unaccountability levelled at associations when they replaced elected local government as the main provider of social housing after 1989, and partly also to win tenant support for stock transfer (Karn 1993, Mullins, Niner & Riseborough 1995). This model created an impression of electoral accountability around the new tenant directors and implied that they served in a representative role (Kearns 1997, Malpass 2000). Tenants were promised more influence over decision-making through access to a seat on the governing body and Audit Commission research confirms that tenants voted for transfer, and supported arms-length management companies at least in part because they
were offered places on the governing boards of the new organisations (Audit Commission 2004a).

Board members and senior officers of housing companies routinely discourage tenant directors from taking an advocacy role at meetings and from speaking for other tenants, and are particularly concerned to prevent them raising specific cases or bringing unresolved complaints to the notice of the board (Clapham & Kintrea 2000). In 2006 the largest housing companies argued that the behaviour of tenant directors was a hindrance to the efficient business operation of social housing companies. They claimed that a high level of knowledge and skills was necessary to govern effectively and that there was no role for tenants at board level (Appleyard 2006). As a result, a review of regulation launched by the Housing Corporation and headed by Sir Les Elton argued that tenants would have a more valuable contribution to make on housing organisations with direct service delivery functions, rather than on strategic boards like the parent organisations of group structures (Elton 2006). Several of the tenant directors interviewed in this study, or speaking in focus groups, had previously served on parent boards and had been relegated, or chosen to move to the boards of area-based sub-committees. Kevin was one, and he explains that his decision not to seek reselection was taken in frustration at the disciplinary pressure exerted on the tenant directors of the parent board:

When I was on the board it were tenant focused. But now it isn’t, it’s strategic. That’s what it is now. Because you can’t touch a board member now. Like when I were on the board everybody could talk to me, or we could go down to [HQ] and walk into [the Chief Executive’s] office and say can I have a word, yeah. But I’m glad I didn’t go on the board, because I like to be on the ground and doing things and seeing things being done, whereas the board they just look at papers and, and sign them off.

These regulatory mechanisms are aimed at enforcing a clear divide between the identity of tenant director and the role of tenant representative in the knowledge that many tenant board members are, or have been, members of local tenants’ organisations (Malpass & Mullins 2002). Brian, a tenant director, who was also a member of his borough Tenants’ Federation, reported that he was regularly
disciplined by the Chair and Chief Officer of his housing organisation for failing to regulate his split identity during board meetings:

I've got to be careful on Board because here [at the Federation] we fight individually for a tenant but on the Board you fight for them all and I still haven’t got that into my head yet because I still start shooting my mouth off about this tenant hasn’t got this and this tenant ain’t got that. [...] And then I get pulled to one side, “you’re fighting for all tenants not just one”.

The requirement on Brian to discipline his behaviour in the boardroom forces him to consciously monitor his identity and to associate it with specific modes of symbolic behaviour. Yet his boardroom identity appears to be play-acting, and beneath the mask he retains a belligerent and stubborn loyalty to a tradition of collective action:

This is where the two caps come in, you see, and you’ve got, oh its terrible, so I think oh well we’re fighting for all of them, wait till I get in office tomorrow [Tenants Federation office] and I’ll show them who I’m fighting for, you know.

In this example, attempts to discipline the behaviour of a tenant director serve only to remind him of his banished identity as a representative of a contentious collective. The antagonism that the project of citizen governance should have exiled from the boardroom returns through the ambiguity of the regulated identity of tenant director. A memory of excluded identities is embedded in the regulated role of tenant director; a tradition of democratic representation and its association with a legacy of collective action form the ‘constitutive outside’ of the project to model the tenant director (Butler 1993: 3). Constituted in subjection and fenced-in by regulation, tenant directors, as all tenants engaged in participation, must daily renew their domestication and it is in this daily renewal of a regulated identity that a tenants’ movement begins to evolve.

This chapter has examined the identity work of tenants in participation and argued that a process of recognition and subjection inspires, and perpetuates their involvement in their landlords’ consultation mechanisms. It analysed the contemporary framework of participation as a process of foreclosure, in which multiple subject positions expressing differing conceptions of rights, equality and
democracy have been unified into a singular definition of participation. That definition foregrounds a vision of a restructured social housing sector in which market mechanisms offering choice and voice sustain a strategy of centralised control and managerial delivery through quasi-privatised providers. A process of hegemonic articulation has constructed a chain of equivalence around tenants’ desire for recognition and their frustration with the power relations of social housing management that has interpellated them into an identification in which their interests and those of housing providers are presented as identical. Difference and antagonism have been expelled and a domain of democratic struggle over contested notions of citizenship, welfare and public service has been enclosed as private space in which a regulated consumer relationship is conducted and a stigmatised welfare relationship is affirmed (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). Participation has become a distinct set of practices that incorporate norms and embody regulated identifications. Tenants are defined through their participation and by how they do it; they are attributed characteristics and values and granted permissions through their iterated performance. Whether they participate, why they participate and how legitimate and beneficial to the requirements of governance their participation may be, become the factors that define the identity of tenants, just as they coalesce to define the meaning of participation.

Yet tenants in this research study have clearly indicated their ability to contest and to reclaim excluded identities that have the potential to shatter this illusion of closure. The recognition that is inherent to participation addresses tenants as equals and references a language of universal rights and citizenship. This enables tenants to contest their subjection and inspires moments of epiphany in which they are able to glimpse the possibility of new identifications. Participation is power exerted on the tenant as subjection that is nevertheless a power assumed by tenants as subjects; it becomes what constitutes them and constitutes the means by which they become (Butler 1997a: 11). The next chapter begins to explore these identifications and the performative practices that may enable a tenants’ movement to develop.
Chapter 6

Constructing Tenant Identities

Marilyn, the secretary of a tenants’ federation, says:

I don’t think that being part of a resident involvement or a residents’ group is giving you power, it’s giving you a voice. I think that’s the difference.

Voice, as Marilyn suggests, is participation shorn of all elements of power or questions of democracy; these factors have been excluded from the hegemonic definition of participation. Participation has become a ritualised production, reiterated through prohibition. While it confers recognition on tenants it forecloses on elements of the empowered citizenship it promises. These foreclosed identifications, articulations of democracy, equality, rights and power, have been excluded from the iterative process of voice, but it is in the return of this ‘constitutive outside’ (Butler 1993: 3) that a tenants’ movement is imagined and collective action re-enters the landlord-tenant relationship. This chapter provides a detailed exploration of this return, beginning with a theorisation of voice as the reiterated practice of participation and evidencing how the performative power of voice is harnessed in tenant identity talk to amend and adapt regulated identifications. It charts the construction of the boundary markers that define the outline of a social movement out of the rituals of participation, and, in its final section, elaborates on the discursive methods through which tenants manufacture a distinct and contentious package of common interests, values and beliefs. It presents a unique analysis of a complex interpretive frame that provides a tenants’ movement with definition through the assemblage of agreement around territorial identity and spatial justice, in which their commitment to an ideal of social housing exerts a contentious force.

Getting our voice heard

The metaphor of voice encapsulates the dominant definition of tenant participation. In the reform of housing policies conducted according to the principles of public choice theory, voice was recruited as a quasi-market
mechanism in the absence of the competitive impact of exit (Boyne & Walker 1999). Just as competition supposedly leads to high performance in private markets, the establishment of opportunities for voice in social housing, as in all public sector services, was intended to bring about improvements in efficiency and effectiveness. Voice, originally considered as political action, was adopted in economic theory as a mechanism ‘like the market’ (Hirschman & Nelson 1976: 386) and conflated with market forces; it was argued that voice brought about ‘behaviour modification in providers’ (Paul 1994: 3). The belief that voice provided market-like stimuli that could steer the behaviour of providers in lieu of a competitive market deeded it with performative power (Finlayson 2003). As a performative, voice should be understood as a process that calls into effect the relations it names. It does more than signify market influence, it provides market signals; it may describe consumer participation but it exerts consumer competition. In John Austin’s (1976) examples, the performative can constitute the institution of marriage by declaring a couple ‘man and wife’, or bestow identity through the phrase ‘I name this ship’. The performative does not describe a situation or an action; the performative makes something happen; as Judith Butler (1997b: 146) says ‘the word becomes the deed’. The performative operates according to Austin (1976: 14) through ‘an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect’. In the regulated social housing sector performative voice exerts its corrective force through a menu of nine involvement options (TSA & Audit Commission 2010). In surveys or focus groups, as mystery shoppers or on estate inspections, as directors or on residents’ panels, the mere presence of tenants in landlord decision-making processes carries the transformative impact of consumer pressure. To take part in authorised participation processes, through one or more of the nine involvement options, is to become an empowered citizen-consumer exercising rational choice in the market place.

The use of ‘voice’ appears to be a typical ontological metaphor (Lakoff & Johnston 1980) in which the process of ‘speaking’ conveys the effect of ‘influence’. A louder voice for tenants may be intended to signify that they have more influence on housing decisions; getting a voice heard might mean that decision-makers change their plans as a result of what tenants have said. Voice is more than a metaphor, however. As a performative it does not stand in for the process of consumer influence, it is consumer influence. By exercising voice within the accepted conventional procedure, tenants reference an idealised
market in which providers are sensitive to consumer needs and through participation they cite an automatic process of market readjustment. Tenants describing the process of participation routinely apply the metaphor of voice as a performative and indicate their expectation of quasi-market effects. When a tenant director of a social housing company relates that he took up his post because 'I felt we weren’t taken seriously, we didn’t have a big enough voice,’ he appears to be citing the normative expectations that regulate the discourse of citizen governance and that ‘put the consumer in the driving seat’ of public services (Cabinet Office 2005: 3). ‘Giving tenants a stronger voice’, ‘ensuring tenants’ voices are heard’ are common expressions used by participants in this research to describe the aims and action of participation and convey a direct causal relationship between speaking to decision-makers and influencing their decisions. In this excerpt Stephanie, a tenant chair of her housing board cites the market performative in her description of the process of participation:

And (0.1) it is also a question of (0.1) just – just making them I mean, y:uh:: like I say, you can’t force someone but if you put your case over strongly enough, and (.) reasoned enough and argued enough then nine times out of ten they will take a second look at it and say well, well we haven’t thought of it that way or and you can actually, you can do (0.2) quite a lot with % just your voi:c:e:%

Here Stephanie gives ‘voice’ careful pronunciation in quiet and elongated tones as if to reinforce her point that tenants need only to articulate their needs in a reasoned and rational manner to have effect. Voice gains its performative impact in obedience to the regulations and rituals surrounding participatory events. It is only through acquiescing to a normative definition of participation, and in disciplining their behaviour accordingly, that tenants can implement market forces.

The identification of tenants in participation is produced through discourse, through the appropriation of Hirschman’s (1970) ‘voice’ to cite an idealised market transferred to the realm of public housing services. For Judith Butler (1993: 2) this is an example of the ‘reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains’ but, importantly, Butler adds that ‘discourse has many more aims and effects than those that are actually intended by its users’ (2000: 157). Hirschman’s ‘voice’ contains a range of meanings that
are not cited in its performative application in the norms and rituals of participation. It was voice that motivated the Black Power movement in USA in the 1960s and that overthrew the German Democratic Republic in 1989 (Hirschman 1970, 1993). Strikes, boycotts and revolution haunt the reiteration of a marketised voice presenting troubling alternatives to the regulated repetition of landlord-tenant relations. In each reiteration voice becomes susceptible to a return of these alternative meanings, or as Butler (2000: 158) explains ‘discourse can produce the possibilities of identities that it means to foreclose’. In the performative ritual of voice tenants are reminded of excluded voices and are presented with a discursive opportunity to engage with a ‘voice’ that extends the meaning of participation into questions of power relations, citizenship and politics.

A performative ‘voice’ can cite notions of collective representation, collective action and participatory democracy. It can be applied to conjure up the imaginary of a tenants’ movement and to give that movement substance through the development of collective action frames. This re-articulation of voice is achieved through the linguistic ambiguities inherent in the expressions of citizenship and consumerism, and through the bi-lingual facility of voice to express these as rival traditions and as a unitary, if hyphenated, concept. T.H. Marshall’s (1950) renowned definition of citizenship entailed the possession of three sets of rights: civil rights that provide for property ownership and grant equality before the law, political rights to vote and take part in decision-making, and contested social rights that allow for an equitable distribution of goods. In the discourse of public service reform, rights to property have assumed a privileged position so that the political right to ‘voice’ has been elided with the civil rights of the citizen to participate in the market. While the concept of social rights has been whittled away, and the idea of entitlement guaranteed by the State has been all-but erased, the expectation of service quality and the ability to exercise consumer influence have become enshrined as constitutional rights for the users of public services (Barron & Scott 1992). This confinement of political and social rights within a commodity transaction leaves behind a marker that enables claims to be made on notions of justice that have been marginalised but not fully excluded (Nicholls & Beaumont 2004). Voice therefore maintains a strong and dynamic discourse of rights that allows it to capture the political and civil identities of citizenship, and express through them the shadow of a claim to social rights. The performative quasi-market voice speaks a
language of universal rights and brings declarations of liberty and equality back to public services.

In this excerpt from an interview with a tenants’ federation member, Brian’s description of a dispute with a housing officer conveys both market force and claims to rights:

I said it’s a tenants choice, I said and that’s what we’ve been fighting for with all this and the tenant has a right and a choice to what they want, not what you want. If it’s no good for a tenant, then explain to the tenant, don’t just say to the tenant you can’t have it. And this is what it’s all about with tenants, you know, they’ve got a right to say what they want and to have their speak.

In this narrative, Brian acknowledges that voice has performative effects in transforming tenants into consumers with ‘a choice to what they want’ but also endows them with political attributes: tenants have a right to voice, ‘to have their speak’, Brian argues, irrespective of whether that voice is heard or acted upon. The divergence of voice from its quasi-market direction is developed further by locating tenant voice in a specific culture that is foreign to the experiences of housing providers. Rather than expressing the commodified needs of social housing consumers, tenant voice contains a particular informational content that is lacking in the ritual discourse of the marketplace. For Stephanie the voice of tenant directors brings a board meeting down to earth and when tenants speak they remind the company that housing is not solely a matter of finance; they affect a performative return of social welfare and ethical concerns to boardroom discourse:

It’s reminding them that there are people, that this isn’t just a business.

Jane’s account of tenant participation in the London Mayor’s Housing Forum mirrors this comment in displaying her belief that tenants speak from a different cultural experience and that their voice contributes a practical sense that undercuts the force of ideology:
I think, although we might be a lone voice, you know only one or two tenants there [...] at least we can bring an air of some reality into those meetings every so often, er, when, you know, it’s surrounded by people who often, not, some of them there genuinely want to improve housing and there’s no question about it, but the top echelons, certainly at the moment, don’t, you know, have this fixation that it all has to be done through the market and we can bring an air of reality down there and we do get consulted, and we have had input

Jane appears to be adopting the normative definition of tenant participation in this quote and resignifying it to perform cultural and political as well as quasi-market outcomes. In her belief in the effectiveness of consultation, she accepts that tenants have a performative voice that ‘enacts that which it names’ (Butler 1995: 134), while depicting the tenant voice as conveying ‘an air of reality’. Tenants, she appears to imply, speak from a different set of experiences and convey a distinct and divergent knowledge through their voice. This experiential knowledge is performative but is also transformative, in that it adds to and impacts on the rational, abstract knowledge of housing decision-makers in its outcome. For the tenant director Kevin, this tenant knowledge comes from ‘out there’ and from ‘the floor’; this is a voice that is alien to housing managers, and yet is somehow more real. He says:

They know what they want out there, the tenants. They come to us and we get it for them.

As a director Kevin possesses the influence to exercise performative voice, but this voice speaks of an excluded collective that has a distinct consciousness of itself, and requires a go-between or interpreter to make it acceptable to power-holders. This notion of a collective, of a body of experiences that are common to social housing tenants, becomes the key framing mechanism in which a performative voice is employed to construct the identity of a tenants’ movement. An initial illustration is provided in this excerpt from an interview with Peter, a tenant board member:
Not having your voice heard was frustrating; I felt we weren’t taken seriously enough. Because we didn’t have a big enough voice there was no way for tenants to get their views through.

The starting point for this reflection is that, despite the pretensions of public choice theory, Peter thinks the performative impact of ‘voice’ does not automatically bring about a market effect. Instead, there are obstacles to the reception of voice: ‘we weren’t taken seriously enough’. Public choice theory appreciates that service users are the least powerful among all the stakeholders influencing public sector organisations, but it still assumes that the trigger of ‘voice’ will be enough to adjust management processes (Paul 1992). In reality, the managers and administrators of public services are subject to conflicting demands from interest groups and governmental agencies and when subjected to the exertion of ‘voice’ from service users, may be very liable to resist this additional, and more controllable, pressure. To be effective voice must be orchestrated collectively, so that it is both loud and untiring, but more importantly, ‘voice’ must be able to back up its sound and fury with the very practical threat of collective protest. As Michael Laver (1976: 464) responded humorously to Hirschman’s original formula, ‘voice’ means ‘staying put and shouting’ but ‘the trouble is, of course, shouting makes us hoarse’. The only occasions when organisations or firms have yielded to ‘voice’ are when ‘exit’ has also been threatened, or when protest has appeared likely to escalate into a significant threat to the activities of the organisation (Kolarska & Aldrich 1980). Voice is ineffective if it remains a market mechanism and it must take on its political connotations to overcome managerial resistance.

Once they have identified obstacles to ‘voice’, then, tenants are enabled to reference its political meanings, and to use it to invoke the idea of a collective. In the second part of the quote above, Peter proceeds to relate voice to a ‘we’, or the notion of tenants as sharing a common identity or collective interests, and he acknowledges, in the struggle ‘to get their views through’, a power imbalance between this collective – tenants – and their landlords. He then goes on to locate this idea of a collective explicitly in a network of local residents associations all seeking access to decision-making:
Once the association was up and running I joined the board to get the voice of the association heard. Then I got in touch with other groups with the same problems getting their views heard at board level.

Public choice theory equates a quasi-market voice with exit, the choice of the rational consumer to switch products, and similarly envisages voice as an individual response. As a theoretical framework it is founded on suspicion of collective action (Olson 1971) so contemporary tenant participation processes, although drawing on a range of managerial discourses, privilege individual responses over collective in obedience to this free market idealism. But tenants who apply the metaphor of voice to convey a market-like influence can also use it to support the development of organisations that apply political processes to ‘get their views heard’. In the following quote two members of a borough federation reference the performative voice, but recommend that tenants apply it as a collective rather than as individuals:

Brian: And we always say you, you’re better fighting as a group than as one individual

Elaine: Than as an individual

Brian: You know because you’ve got a better, better chance

Elaine: Got a better voice, as a group than you have (0.2) on your own

The performative power of voice can endow organisations with the status of a movement and grant them defined interests, a sense of purpose and a dynamic of progress as this TPAS focus group excerpt suggests.

Elizabeth: It seems to me, umm, that now, whereas it was like trying to bring, tenants trying to get their voice heard, it seems to me as though the, uh, we’re now bringing the landlords into the 21st century.

Moderator: So tenants are making the running?

Elizabeth: I think so

Moderator: They’re kind of in charge?

Elizabeth: I wouldn’t say we were exactly in charge but we’re letting them know, we know, we know our rights now and the land[ ] well, a lot of the
landlords still don’t really like it, but, umm, treat them gently and we'll bring them into the 21st century.

The speaker, Elizabeth, does not believe that the development of tenant participation as ‘voice’ has triggered automatic improvements among housing organisations. Instead change is being brought about as a process of tenant struggle in which appeals are made to universal rights. Participation is something that has to be fought for and won. This narrative of struggle conflates the implied property rights of the consumer with a tradition of agitation for political and social rights, as can be seen in Carmen’s contribution to a discussion group at a later TPAS conference:

I always say it’s fighting for the rights of tenants, I don’t mean physically in fisticuffs, but it’s about fighting. A lot of young tenants come on board and they think this has always been here. It has been a fight and it has been a struggle to achieve what we have achieved.

The quasi-contractual relationship conveyed in consumerist voice enables tenants to challenge their landlords as producers, but also cites this accompanying narrative of political rights. This combination of available meanings enables voice to signal the outline of a social movement through the equations of the market. At the same TPAS discussion in 2010, Nick conducts a tortuous but illuminating linguistic journey around the troublesome concept of the consumer-citizen:

If you’re a tenant you’re in a relationship with a, a landlord, you know you’re having this, and, um, that, that’s a sort of contractual relationship even if you’ve got other rights, what the tenants movement has attached to those rights, I think ultimately, originally there was, it was just a you and them relationship, I think the tenants movement for me is about making links with other tenants who are in similar situations so that sort of one to one contractual relationship is, is seen in the context of your, your neighbours and your community because there’s usually one landlord for a lot of tenants
In the first stage in this journey Nick breaches the isolation of the individual consumer to establish a collective contract, while implicitly misdirecting the relationship from the housing service to encompass a concept of neighbourhood and community. In the development of this argument below, Nick uses the rights discourse inherent in ‘voice’ to affirm the existence of a social movement that goes beyond the contractual relationship and the confines of a landlord-tenant service.

But it's about, it's the struggle to try to win rights that go beyond that original deal, offer from the landlord which is on the landlord's terms, I mean what you're given. I mean the tenants’ movement is a kind of self-parodying term, because it's about your home. Tenant is what the landlord calls you, ((laughs)) you know, that's their term for you, you know, you know. It's your home and it's giving, it's working with your neighbours to give yourself rights to stay in that home and to make sure that home becomes a community.

In elaborating a concept of home and community, Nick indicates the adaptability of voice's performative power. By accessing a vocabulary of rights through voice, Nick is able to exit the market definition of housing entirely and to construct the outline of a de-commodified service, voicing housing as security, housing as a social right. The language of exit and voice appears easily adaptable to the identity talk of social movements, since it can proceed from a lack of choice to an appeal for equality and then on to the vocabulary of struggle, as Steven illustrates in the same discussion:

So movement, the word movement to me suggests where there's an inequality between the person providing the, whatever you want to call it, the service, the object, and the person receiving it. There's an inequality and often the person receiving these services, or whatever it is, may be static in that place, so the only way to change what you have and what you're stuck in, and where you've got no choice, is to coalesce and form with your fellow people and try and band together and share in a movement, in a, actually act against whoever's providing you with a service, and housing very much fits into that, social housing fits into that, because there virtually is no market, there virtually is no choice
Once the justification for a social movement is established in the context of voice a new lexicon becomes available to provide shared purpose and imply continuity between the past and present, as an excerpt from an earlier TPAS focus group shows:

Ted: I see tenants as a movement
Karen: Mm, mm
Moderator: Yes? So why do you think that?
Ted: Well, well we, we want to change things, we want to benefit, that's what, what we’re doing
Stephanie: If one person can't do it then
Ted: We want to have a united front if
Karen: Yeah
Ted: If you want to change things

As voice ranges from consumer rights to social rights and from the commodity to the de-commodified, the imaginary of a tenants’ movement with a shared vision of purposeful change is enabled, citing political traditions of popular struggle and associations with the trade union and labour movement. Here members of neighbourhood tenants associations discuss the need for collective action by social housing tenants and utilise concepts familiar from industrial disputes:

Greta: If you fight for a thing, for improvements, we try and (. ) get the things done, but if you haven't got a tenants association, you haven't a leg to stand on (. ) 'cause they don't take no notice of you
Sara: Strength in numbers
Greta: That's right
Jane: It gives sort of like a collective voice for various things

A tenants’ association is here defined as a collective voice that provides strength though unity, and it is worth remembering that correspondence from the National Tenants Organisation in the 1980s bore the concluding sentence ‘Remember
unity is strength, let us go forward together’. This association of the consumer-citizen voice with trade union struggles is made explicit by Fran who says:

I just believe that I had a grandfather who was very union and very Labour Party focused and he always said that if you don’t stand up and be counted you don’t get things changed.

The reference to ‘standing up for your rights’ in this quote addresses the political responsibilities of the citizen and the consumer’s right to redress and conlates them with the more contested struggle for social rights. This incursion of social rights into the market place allows the performative voice to enact a contentious collective action in the landlord-tenant relationship. In defining the purpose of his federation Brian states combatively:

We always have and always will do, as long as we can, is fight for us tenants’ rights […] We’re dedicated to us tenants and we fight for us tenants.

The language of collective action, with its incantation of political and social rights, is allied to a sense of history and tradition in which progress in housing conditions is attributed to the mobilisation of tenants as a movement. At his tenants’ federation Bernard says:

If it wasn’t for the tenants’ movement I’m afraid we’d all be in terraced houses with the lavvy at the end of the road.

This sense of legacy and historical progress sees the performative voice plucked from its consumer context and transported to a Nineteenth Century model of revolutionary citizenship from where Wendy can access it to advocate change in national housing and social policy at a 2009 TPAS conference.

Any movement’s got to get to the top as they did in Chartism in the Victorian days and, um, you know, to get the movement done at the top level with government as well as with tenants. Because tenants’ cries have
to be recognised at governmental level in order that action can be taken and then followed through.

In this realignment of the concept, ‘voice’ as collective action expresses a process of political negotiation and strategy in contradiction to the immediate market-like impact that is imagined in the dominant definition of participation. Barbara, a tenants’ association secretary, does not envisage participation as a market-place but as a forum, or political arena, where political alliances are necessary and a long-term strategic approach is necessary when making deals. Voice does not have the impact of market rationality and it is necessary to build support for it to be heard:

I think when you do speak out there’s got to be someone there to listen and to carry it forward (0.1) and you’ve got to have a lot of patience

The linguistic code that Stephanie felt she needed to adopt to be effective within the protocol of board meetings, is seen by John, another tenant director, as simply a tactical consideration in the process of recruiting supporters. He is very aware that a tenant ‘voice’ has to be the expression of aims, objectives and strategy:

I will not dilute my voice. It’s how you do it, isn’t it? You don’t get up on the table and start kicking and shouting. You don’t need to be rude. You need to be able to put your point across firmly, objectively, resolutely. And you need to bow to the knowledge that you may not be able to win the battle but you can come back in another 12 months and have another go. There are people you can persuade [...] It’s using all the levers that tenants have to enable them to win the debate with management

Performative voice has been applied to endow tenants with rights, to imply their possession of a body of knowledge, to construct the imaginary of a collective, and to mobilise it, at least in identity talk, as a social movement with the suggestion of aims, objectives and strategy. To sum up, voice, the constitutive power of the dominant model of participation, is assumed to have a performative effect in that the mere presence of tenants in decision-making processes
influences the outcome. This market-place definition excludes more political notions of collective action or democracy from the meaning of participation and constructs an identity for tenants around their constrained role as consumers of a welfare service. Tenants in this study, however, appear to resignify the meaning of voice, while still adopting it as a performative. In their discourse, voice can be used to effect the imaginary of a movement, and to construct the assumption of collective interests. It carries with it an awareness of a tradition of struggle, and of political strategy, and conceals within its market discipline a language of rights that can range from civil to social. Messages of collective action can be rediscovered, accessed and performed to erect the boundary markers that delineate the outline of a tenants’ movement.

The imaginary of a movement

The imaginary of a tenants’ movement conjured through voice enables new identifications to be forged and negative social definitions to be renegotiated. Within the boundary markers erected to shape a movement, ‘a set of shared, repeated and meaningful references’ (Fine 1995: 128) is generated to provide a distinctive cultural assemblage of common narratives, traditions and interpretive frames. The production of these frames in the identity talk of tenants is a process of movement construction in which a shared collective definition and fabric of common interests is pieced together (Taylor & Whittier 1992). This identity work can be explored through the social movement technique of frame analysis (Goffman 1974, Snow et al 1986) to examine the individual narratives and collective beliefs that construct the imaginary of a movement and provide it with a package of un-written, and largely un-acknowledged beliefs. Robert Benford and David Snow (2000: 615) argue that:

‘Collective action frames are constructed in part as movement adherents negotiate a shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation they define as in need of change, make attributions regarding who or what is to blame, articulate an alternative set of arrangements, and urge others to act in concert to affect change.’

These frames are accenting devices in that they reference and reorganise existing perceptions and understandings (Snow & Benford 1992); they enable
tenants as a collective to articulate and align familiar meanings so that they point to new conclusions. Collective action frames are the discursive process in which the excluded meanings of Hirschman’s ‘voice’ make their troubling return and in which the dominant identifications of participation policy find their challenge.

The tenants’ movement that manifests itself out of identity work in this research is constructed around three collective action frames. These frames set out a package of beliefs that are articulated from shared narratives and that are presented, though not overtly or systematically, as ‘what the movement stands for’. They share ‘core framing tasks’ (Snow & Benford 1988) that cement the feelings of relative deprivation shared by social housing tenants, develop an alternative set of beliefs, or differently align dominant beliefs, and provide the motivational arguments that encourage collective action. They also echo the original frame alignment processes identified by David Snow and colleagues (1986) in that they seek to bridge and extend elements of dominant frames and discourses to construct new arguments and to amplify shared experiences and values so that they take on contentious meanings. In this chapter and the next, each of the three frames has been depicted diagrammatically, following the methodology popularised by Hank Johnston (1995, 2002), to supplement the analysis of framing processes. These diagrams visually represent the frames as hierarchical structures with the top level or frame ‘rims’ pointing to the orienting principles or shared components drawn from the individual narratives that construct the frame. While such diagrammatic representation is useful in making clear the range, connections and layers of belief inherent in each frame, it should not be inferred from this that frames are static structures. These diagrams are snapshots that can only represent a moment in the research and frames change according to the experience and identity work of their participants (Miethe 2009).

The second and third frames, around experiential knowledge and power relations in social housing, and about direct democracy and collective action respectively, will be analysed in the next chapter. This section analyses the frame that constructs shared interests, and provides a sense of common cause to define a tenants’ movement. It is more than ‘a circuit of exchanges’ that percolates among focus groups (Melucci 1994: 127); this appears to be a formative frame that situates the movement in a specific locale, that attributes to
it a package of embattled beliefs and that provides a diagnosis of injustice and therefore the motivation for collective action. It constructs an edifice of common interest for the tenants’ movement in a passionate commitment to the ideal of social rented housing as a public good packaged as an expression of spatial justice. This frame is a discourse of community that contrives at a fundamental resignification of dominant community narratives and produces a resonant set of beliefs founded on mutual aid and co-operation.

The collective action frame, titled here ‘Community Ownership’, is the interpretive schemata most widely shared by tenants in this research sample, and was manifest in 84 per cent of focus groups and interviews. The title of the frame bears no connection to the Scottish model of stock transfer to community ownership companies; instead, it describes the invocation of a combative public in spatial contentions over social housing. It is a wide ranging frame that connects a passionate commitment to the idea of social rented housing with co-operative and mutual traditions expressed through a sense of place. In its diagnosis of the decline of community, it identifies the incursion of free market principles into social housing policy as unleashing destructive forces of individualism. It defines a tenants’ movement around a localism that promotes a sense of common ownership in which there are elements of class identification, and articulates social rented housing as a process of mobilisation that challenges the effect of the market.

In Figure 1 the internal structure of the interpretive processes analysed here as a ‘Community Ownership’ frame is graphically displayed. Its ‘rim’ is made up of three shared interpretations or sets of arguments that are complimentary and inextricably linked. The first argument is around social rented housing and is both a defence of that stigmatised tenure and a celebration of its attributes. The second is an identification of social housing tenants as essentially co-operative and concerned with their community and its services in a re-interpretation of dominant messages around active citizenship. The third area of agreement is around a notion of public space and here narratives of community are allied with claims on spatial justice to infuse political theory into identities linked to social housing and community action. Under each interpretative strand are displayed the contributing elements in a descending hierarchy intended to represent the diversity of individual views that coalesce around shared identifications.
Figure 1: Frame of Community Ownership

Community Ownership
(in 84% of focus groups & interviews)
“You all own the estate”

Championing Social Interaction
‘Social housing, social as in interacting with other human beings’

Defence of Mono-Tenure
‘tenants are more socially conscious’

‘Proud to be a Council Tenant’

‘You’re not on your own anymore’

Campaigning Citizenship
‘We’ve been around, we’ve been involved’

Working for the common good
‘Satisfaction in knowing you’re trying to do something for everybody’s benefit’

Defending community facilities

Organising community events

Obligation to future generations

‘Advocating for people’s rights’

‘We should feel safe’

Widening public space
‘It’s not about the house, it’s about the community’

‘Neighbours who will speak to you’

Deliberative democracy (link to democracy frame)

‘Community means to me, we discuss with our neighbours, the problems we have’
The ‘Community Ownership’ frame appears to resurrect the principle of a universal model of social housing: as public housing for general needs rather than the residualised welfare safety net that public policy intends; in reality an exclusionary model, but associated with a political commitment to improving the fortunes of the working class (Harloe 1995). In denying all criticisms of the sector, in celebrating the mono-tenure of the estate, and in attributing socially beneficial outcomes to social renting, the tenants in this research appear to be reprising the defence of mass social housing mobilised by tenants’ organisations in the early 1970s. The Tenants Charter authored by the Association of London Housing Estates in 1970 called for a duty on local authorities to build ‘balanced communities and estates’ through a universal housing allowance and talked of housing as a ‘non-profit making community service’ (Craddock 1975: 4). Although the argument for general needs public housing was decisively lost with the passing of the 1972 Housing Finance Act, the appeal of a universal model was preserved by the tenants’ movement. In 1978 the Tenants’ Charter launched by the National Tenants’ Organisation began with the claim that ‘the right to decent housing is a fundamental right’ (Hood & Woods 1994: 64). The contemporary tenants’ movement still maintains its support for mass public rented housing and in 2008 the three national tenants’ organisations, Taroe, the National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations, and the Confederation of Co-operative Housing attacked a governmental policy bias in favour of home ownership and called for an expansion of public house building.

After more than forty years of policy intended to residualise the social rented sector by making it unattractive and difficult to access (Kemeny 1995), it is surely unusual that tenants display such consistent support for social housing. It is even more worthy of interest that tenants do not just defend the sector against its mainstream critics, but roundly condemn current housing policy for undermining social relations, and attribute a whole set of socially beneficial attributes to the experience of social renting. According to the comparative cohort study Growing Up in Social Housing in Britain (Lupton et al 2009) the beneficial effects of the sector have been in decline since the 1970s and the contemporary experience of social renting is now likely to be worse in terms of quality of accommodation than renting in the private sector or homeownership. The last generation apparently to enjoy real advantages from social renting were the cohort born in 1946 for whom a council house meant their first indoor toilet, a
bathroom and hot water, and quite likely a garden, amenities that made the public housing sector a step up from private renting and even homeownership. Many of the tenants in this research sample would fall into the age range represented by the 1946 cohort study: they are aged in their sixties or over. Their positive experience of a ‘golden age’ of public housing, before the impact of residualising policy, may contribute to the individual narrative strands that construct this strident frame in celebration of social renting. But even those born into, or moving into the public housing sector in the 1960s, remembered social housing as an overwhelmingly positive experience.

Mike, who was born in 1945 and brought up in a council house recalls:

There was no stigma […] There was a cross section of normal people living in a row of council houses and they were fine, wonderful houses.

Lester moved from the private rented sector to council housing in 1969 but his experience was similar:

It was a beautiful house, brand new estate, real nice people. The front lawns were all open plan. The houses, they were actually still building some of them when we moved in. And there was no (...) stigma. It was like, it was a step up.

The decline and fall of this mass model of social housing is attributed by Jim to the introduction of Right to Buy:

Before that time people who lived in council houses, as they said, they were mixed, teachers and all sorts of people, lived together in a community. But when they started to get their mortgages and move out, we were left with the people who were more poor than those who moved out.

Loyalty to social housing is still marked among the 1960s generation, and those who bought their council house under Right to Buy did not always move away from the estates. Lester cites his brothers as an example:
They still live on the same estate, the houses they bought. They haven't bought and moved away, they didn’t move out of the estate and buy another house. They bought the house on the estate.

Ruth Lupton and fellow researchers (2009) depict in their cohort studies a social housing sector declining, both in popularity, and in beneficial outcomes, sharply from the 1970s. It is clear, however, from Andrew’s biographical narrative that even in the 21st Century social housing is still capable of inspiring loyalty and that certain benevolent values can be evidenced in the sector.

I left home in the late 80s, um, moved into private rented accommodation, a private landlord, and moved into social housing [...] and then, at that point, I did notice there was a difference. There was a difference in the rents, and there was a difference in the way you (.) were, kind of, looked after.

It would appear that the construction of a collective action frame around the beneficial values of social rented housing is not limited solely to those residents whose experience was of a booming sector promising better quality homes and social mobility. The generations experiencing social housing in the 1940s to 1960s appear to have glimpsed something that appeared as a universal model of public housing and they use opportunities like the focus groups of this research study to pass on these positive memories. But an appreciation of the attributes of social housing is not confined to these generations, and it seems likely that the framing processes observed in this research draws on contemporary experiences of social housing as well as those of the past. As Colin Bell and Howard Newby (1978) maintained, housing is an area where the most intimate connections between the personal and the political are established. The primary source of values for most tenants in this study has been their experience of living in social housing in neighbourhoods where financial hardship is never too distant, where a secure affordable home provides a base for personal and political development. As Tony, a director of the national organisation, Taroe, says:

If you get a person’s home right and it’s secure for them, you can take on all the things that hit you in life as long as you’ve got a safe and secure place to go back to sleep.
Tenants in this research champion social rented housing as a tenure of choice and, in a twist of argument, they blame the deprivation associated with social housing in contemporary housing discourse on the fragmentation of estates through the policy of mixed communities (Hills 2007). This argument is developed by characterising home ownership as promoting individualism and selfishness, while social housing is defined as encouraging co-operation and mutuality. The tenure diversity introduced initially by the Right to Buy to former social housing estates has become, in dominant housing discourse, the means of regenerating community. The entrepreneurial benefits of property ownership and the social capital of middle income households with spending power have been mobilised to rescue the caricature ‘council’ estate, with its concentration of poverty, disadvantage and the area effects of deprivation (Manzi 2010). Social housing has been blamed for encouraging welfare dependency and hindering social mobility (Dwelly & Cowans 2006). Social housing estates, already mixed through the selling of council houses, have been depicted in government studies and popular culture as tracts of uniform concrete blocks, isolated from their surroundings, whose inhabitants do not share mainstream aspirations or norms. Mono-tenure, where that tenure is social rented housing, has been blamed for concentrating deprivation and generating ‘deviant’ cultures (Hanley 2007, Hutton 2007, CLG 2009b).

Rebelling against this central tenet of housing policy, tenants reframe a dominant communitarian discourse around the break-down of community (Frazer 1999) to argue that uniformity of tenure, where that tenure is social housing, cements community bonds and builds shared interests. They accuse Right to Buy and the subsequent mixed communities initiative of fracturing the ties of commonality that once united social housing estates. This can be discerned in the following excerpt from a focus group with a regional tenants’ federation:

Richard: Yeah but it’s the housing now, on estates, such as there was, er, going back when everybody was a tenant, a council house tenant, now there is so much [interplay]

Theresa: [diversity]
Richard: With homeowners, right, that is, they’re not doing their input into the estate as what the tenants are through their organisations.

Theresa: Yeah

Richard: Right, and there, that is what’s letting it down.

John, a member of a borough tenants’ federation and tenant director, advances this frame to portray ‘mixed communities’ as the cause of anti-social behaviour rather than the cure:

Under the Right to Buy, we now have mixed estates, mixed occupancy, and the people who have bought houses have sold them and passed on and in some cases that has had a detrimental effect on the communities that the media pick up on.

Mixed communities bring disharmony and disorder, Jane asserts at another tenants’ federation:

I think there’s a real problem now because breaking up these mono-tenure estates has actually created instability, rather than the other way round.

Jane goes on in this focus group discussion, to posit a direct causal link between the Right to Buy and increased turnover on estates, arguing that this creates a sense of dislocation and undermines feelings of community and social harmony:

Jane: The problem we have on a lot of our estates now is, because of the Right to Buy, and because the original Right to Buy people have sold, (0.1) we now have (.) quite fragmented, um, communities because a lot of them are let on, you know, short-term tenancies, six months. (.hh) I live on a very small estate, there are only 63 properties, personally, but, um, you know, you see people walking across the yard and, you know, round [through the estate]

Harry: [Don’t know them]

Jean: You don’t know them because they change so, so rapidly. Now the residents, who lived there a long time, whether they’re leaseholders or
tenants, have a tradition of having organised things regularly on the estate.

What is being advanced in these tenant discourses is a revisionist frame in which a golden age of popular social housing was destabilised by the forces of privatisation with subsequent loss of neighbourhood relations, stability and safety. The impact of the original Right to Buy and subsequent re-sales on council housing estates has been mixed but, in some cases, dramatic. Where popular and stable estates saw high sales under the Right to Buy, population turnover was not affected drastically in the short to medium term by re-sales. However, some low-demand social housing estates have seen substantial redevelopment to create a diverse housing market leading to multiple transactions and the development of transitory populations through an expanding Buy to Let sector. The overall reduction of available council housing and the concentration of ‘those with least choice and bargaining power’ in the least popular residual stock (Jones & Murie 2006: 148), has destabilised neighbourhoods of social housing, and it was in these least desirable estates that private landlords bought in the Right to Buy re-sale market. There is, therefore, plentiful ammunition to counter the policy aim of mixed communities, and to re-associate community with the consistency and uniformity of mono-tenure social renting.

Very privileged people

In challenging the years of stigma associated with social rented housing, the tenant frame is unstinting in its championship of mono-tenure. Far from being the sector of disintegration and neighbourhood breakdown as the dominant stigmatisation discourse has it, tenants assert that social housing is communal and neighbourly and contrast it with what they claim is the essential isolation of homeownership. The ‘Community Ownership’ frame constructs this linkage between the tenure of social housing and a more co-operative way of life through two discursive strands. The first is rooted in the services attached to social housing; the fact that it is a managed tenure where some sort of regular contact with the landlord, repairs contractors, or in supported accommodation
with care staff, is part of the package. The benefits of public housing are catalogued in this TPAS conference focus group from 2009:

Clare: There are a lot of people in the private sector say “oh wish we could get that, wish we could have someone come and repair our homes within a few hours of a flood burst” and, I mean I think we’re very privileged people.

Sarah: I think we’re better off than those in private accommodation to be honest.

Clare: To get repairs done, to have someone.

Linda: You just pay your rent and you get it all done.

Here social housing is positioned as a tenure of choice and as presenting strong competition to the attractions of home ownership. It is not just the management services integral to social renting that distinguish the tenure, however. Barbara, secretary of her tenants association, points to the quality of building design in the social housing sector, and the benefits of renting from regulated landlords:

I’m quite proud of the fact that I’m a council tenant. I’ve got a beautiful home and I live in an area where sheds are let and if you could see the condition of some of the private, its called shed city, in some of the houses that the private landlords let and expect people to live, you’d be, like me, proud to be a council tenant.

John, the member of a tenants’ federation, gives these claims a historical context, and echoing a tradition of tenant struggle, reflects on the council house building programme of the 1945 Labour government, to characterise private housing development as substandard and unresponsive to housing need:

You look at the development after the war and if it wasn’t for the principle of quality in social housing, we could have got a lot of speculative building, like we have now, a lot of rabbit hutches.

The association of social housing with social welfare and public good is easily transposed through the second strand of the frame to present the tenure as
essentially co-operative and to claim that this mutuality expresses itself in collective action. In a focus group at the TPAS conference, Robert explains that social interaction is intrinsic to the tenure, and alien to the owner occupied sector:

Social housing, social as in interacting with other human beings, that’s what social means. We are in a great position because we’ve got a quality of life which is far superior to people stuck in their private bloody little houses.

Yvonne tells a story about the estate where she used to live. She describes it as a mixed community, with social rented, shared ownership, and owner-occupied housing clustered along the same access road, each tenure occupying a different section of the road. Yvonne recounts how tenure divisions were visible through the number of children playing in the street.

On the rented part of the estate the kids all played together, the parents looked out for each other, the second lot [shared ownership], you would see one or two kids playing on their doorstep and in the third lot [owner occupation] never see any at all.

This assertion that social housing encourages sociability is also advanced by Jane who imbues all social housing tenants with the values of mutual aid and co-operation:

And, you know, but they also are, in the main, quite good about looking after their neighbours, joining in with things and so on, considering the other children on, you know, people’s children on the estate and all this sort of thing. So actually they’re probably more socially conscious than a lot of people who live outside the council house environment.

In this further extract from the 2009 TPAS focus group, it becomes clear that the mobilisation of tenants’ associations on social housing estates is being presented as an effect of the tenure, and as essential to the nature of social renting as the repairs service.
Clare: I’m sat at home and if anything goes wrong, then someone will come, to help or repair it or whatever

Sara: It’s security isn’t it

Wendy: Well when I arrived in this position I could not believe the facilities that were available to me and, uh,

Clare: The help is there

Wendy: And was, I’m still absolutely bowled over by belonging to this, I’m very proud to belong to my residents group, now, and, um,

Linda: Proud to be a tenant

Wendy: And to be a representative of that body

Clare: And you’re not on your own any more, as well, you know. You may if you had gone into private housing, you’d have been on your own in a little block, you know

This argument is rooted in a tradition of local tenants’ associations as a seemingly organic development on social housing estates since the 1920s. The aim of the tenants’ associations studied by researchers ranging from Duncan Mitchell and Thomas Lupton in 1954, George Goetschius (1969), through Tony Gibson (1979), Charlie Cooper and Murray Hawtin (1998), to Alison Ravetz (2001) was to ‘safeguard and promote the interests of all the tenants on the estate’ through negotiation with the authorities, as Ruth Durant (1939: 31) originally observed. In the present study Jean recounts the history of her tenants association, familiar to countless other groups on other estates:

It was to get something going for the tenants on the estate and the kids and somewhere to go where you could, where the rent- they called him the rent man then, ((laughs)) could come and you could give him a load of verbal, you know that kind of thing. And we got the converted house for the tenants and we used to have all different groups there, you know, we’d have exercise groups, we’d have computer groups, we had kids groups, nursery things for mums and tots and, all different things we had there, you know.
Tenants’ organisations are often motivated by issues around the quality of the neighbourhood, its facilities, services and upkeep and can be active in a range of local and national campaigns. They have been the vehicle for mass mobilisations against threats to social housing; the campaign against Housing Action Trusts at the end of the 1980s is one example (Karn 1993). In the discursive construction of the ‘Community Ownership’ frame it is possible to glimpse a declaration of this contentious identity based on appeals to shared interests. In the following quote from Jane the tenants’ association is positioned as a defender of community services.

I think our tenants organisations in our borough, you know, do an awful lot of work for the local community because we’ve been around, we’ve been involved in the campaign for the local school or whatever it was, over a long period of time.

This is an image of a community and its facilities under attack from the State; a community whose residents are committed to maintaining their schools and other local services from cut-backs. This image of community is one in which a feeling of communal ownership surrounds the local statutory services perhaps because they have been supported as much by the voluntary work of local people as by State agencies.

You all own the estate

Stuart Lowe (1986) argued that the ability to mobilise support for local tenants associations stemmed from an awareness of shared interests among residents with a common landlord, as well as from a working class social base concentrated in council housing estates. This concept of a working class united by housing tenure was quick to disintegrate as the rise of home ownership excavated divisions around housing consumption in the working class (Saunders 1990). The ‘Community Ownership’ frame, however, appears to rekindle ideas of common interest constructed out of shared public space and suggests that the class divisions of tenure can be overcome. This frame appears to advocate a sense of spatialised public ownership in constructing a series of claims around the nature of community. Instead of the traditional narrative of lost
certainties and order, it advances a concept of community as public space enacted through relationships of mutuality, opposed to the forces of privatisation and the divisions of individualism.

In an interview at his tenants’ federation office, John applies this concept beyond the limits of social renting to reclaim a sense of working class commonality in opposition to the divisions of housing consumption that now act as permanent barriers:

It’s about making them see if you live on a mixed estate you all own the estate. They are all of equal value when it comes to community values. They own their community and it’s about working together, working in partnership. It’s difficult for a tenant that’s bought his own home. He may think he’s made a vast leap forward; he may think he’s better than tenants – it’s just a mental attitude.

The rhetoric of community ownership raised in this research is evidence of an attempt to resignify the frame of community that has dominated governmental discourse in Conservative and Labour regimes. Community became the locale of governance under the New Labour government and was seen as a territory where the bonds of neighbourhood and family values were recruited to the policing of conduct (Cochrane 2003, Flint 2003). David Cameron, taking power for the Coalition Government in May 2010, also saw voluntary and community organisations as a tool for social renewal and a ‘big society’, defined, in the rare moments it became something concrete, as the promotion of family life, of personal and social responsibility, and the outsourcing of public services (Cameron 2009b). Tenants’ organisations are supported in government policy both as a behavioural tool to exert a set of civic values on community members and as reminder of the duty of good citizens to promote values of self-discipline, voluntary service and civic vigilance. In communitarian thought, tenants are sucked into a moral landscape where their voluntary commitment serves to strengthen a set of behavioural norms that help government govern (Rose 1999). One of the vehicles for this discourse of governance has been the nostalgic lament for lost working class community catalogued by Jacqui Karn (2007). In mourning the passing of a time when the front door was left unlocked, parents were respected, and policemen could clip children round the ear, these narratives support the argument of moral collapse pronounced in the works of
Amitai Etzioni and Charles Murray, and reinforce strategies that characterise social housing estates as dangerous places whose inhabitants lack the capacities needed to prevent the rise of crime and anti-social behaviour (Card 2006).

The community discourse constructed by tenants’ organisations appears to reference this narrative but harness it to a different strategy, adopting ‘frame bridging’ (Snow et al 1986) to construct new meanings from a reassuringly familiar discourse. In a focus group, Christine presents the decision of her tenant management organisation to take over the running of the estate in terms of a narrative of lost community. She recounts her determination to:

Get the community to how I remember the community round here being, not like it is now.

Reminiscing about the safe and companionable estate her parents knew, she tells a familiar tale:

You could at one time rely on your neighbour if you were ill. You can't do that anymore. Because they lock themselves in, and they don't want to know, they don't want to get involved. And that's not, to me, that's not a community.

Christine is clear about what she wants to achieve through the tenant management organisation.

We should be able to walk out of our front door in comfort and feel safe. We should be able to walk up and down without fear of intimidation, and the elderly should feel safe. And that's what I'm hoping to achieve, to get this community back to how it were, where people are not frightened, and I think I might get there eventually.

This argument about fear and safety is familiar to the traditional narrative of loss, but in Christine’s account community is defined by its ties of mutual aid, and loss has brought about isolation and disengagement: ‘they don’t want to know; they don’t want to get involved’. Christine’s husband Gary amplifies this argument to express the loss of community purely in spatial terms. Gary indicates a small
space on a piece of paper and says: ‘A lot of people now if that’s their house, that’s their space isn’t it?’ Moving his hands to frame a wider space, he continues:

That’s not the space anymore, that’s their space in their house. And that’s why you go out here on a night you’ll not see anybody walking around.

What Christine and Gary appear to be advocating is not a return to the norms of civil behaviour and discipline but a strategy to reclaim public space. The desire to foster bonds of mutuality and care may be one of the strands that enable the concept of community to be recruited to a regulatory agenda, but it can also convey a wish to create social and political change, and carries with it a long history of political dissent (Taylor 2003). Mutuality can be used as a tool of mobilisation, as the first step in building collective feelings of efficacy, and in developing the relations necessary for more participatory decision-making, as Lynn Staeheli (2002) noted in her research with women in community organisations. Christine and Gary’s argument about public space bears relation to Jean’s emphasis on the community as a territory that needs defending, and to John’s rhetoric about community ownership. In the discourse of tenants, community does not always appear as a site of morality or discipline. Instead it is talked of as a co-operative endeavour constructed around public space. As Marcie says at a TPAS focus group:

Community for me means that we are, we discuss with our neighbours, our friends, the people around us the problems we have within housing.

Unspoken class narratives appear within this discourse, as if public space operated as a metaphor for an imaginary working class culture founded on the principles of mutual aid. Paul Watt (2008) and Mike Savage (2000) have remarked on the coding of class signifiers in popular discourse and have particularly analysed the expression of working class identification through declarations of commonality; both authors for instance discussed the use of the phrase ‘ordinary people’ to express class division. The tenant frame of community stresses elements of collective ownership and traditions of mutual aid that were central to the development of an English working class (Thompson 1968). Eileen and Stephen Yeo (1988) argue that notions of community
originated in an oppositional working class culture of mutuality. This was a ‘community made by people for themselves’; a social relation that resulted from ‘the continual practice of mutual support from the people within it’ (Yeo 1988: 231). Constructed around informal networks of relatives and neighbours, and led by women, this was a culture that, at its most articulate, expressed a vision of the transformation of social relations on co-operative principles.

The collapse of community is directly attributed by tenants in this study to a trajectory of public policy that has championed home ownership as the only acceptable tenure and has undermined the public housing services that once insured against risk. The connection tenants forge between community and public space contrasts sharply with the privatisation of space in urban regeneration and renaissance schemes recorded by Anna Minton (2009), founded on rampant individualism, characterised by the gated community. As Susan, a regional federation member says:

We’ve got this kind of situation where, as things kind of deteriorated in terms of the, kind of, funding going into local authority housing and instead of it being seen as a positive thing that it was suddenly we should all own our own home, which came from all parties [ ..] That has without doubt divided communities, it’s divided young people from old people, young people have had to move away from their families, so you have isolated elderly people, you have new people from new communities who’ve come in, who have no real resources, and the existing community has no real resources to bring those people together and to make them function well together.

The ‘Community Ownership’ frame is oppositional in its rejection of the contemporary direction of housing policy and the market-driven individualism brought about through the erosion of support for public housing. It articulates collective action to develop relations of care as an oppositional strategy, positing mutuality, collective provision and co-operation as alternative principles. In the following extract Susan encourages tenants’ organisations to re-engage in neighbourhood action as a strategy of mobilisation. Recounting an earlier period when her tenants’ association provided a range of social and welfare activities on her estate, she says:
You know they did outings, fun days, the whole range of things, which I would kind of describe as community focused rather than housing focused. I think that’s where the tenant movement, in a sense, has been diverted off, because I think it’s a bit of a diversion off into the landlord’s (.) views of what should happen, rather than the tenant views […] And all of the time, the tenants associations, in a sense, through the structures in the local authority, have got more and more focused in on the technicalities of housing issues, so, all of us, myself included, spend a hell of a lot of time going to local authority-organised meetings, and all of us come away complaining that the consultation is just about them ticking a box and we’ve achieved nothing from it.

In this narrative tenant participation is depicted as a diversion; tenants’ organisations have been sidetracked into attending pointless meetings where they hope to be consulted, and concern themselves with the minutia of policies that have no impact on the real issues. Instead, a return to community is sketched out, not in some nostalgic sense, but as a mobilisation strategy to rediscover the aims of the tenants’ movement. Here the social activities organised by tenants’ associations, decried by Stuart Lowe (1986) as a retreat from radicalism, are seen as recruiting and sustaining a neighbourhood movement.

The ‘Community Ownership’ frame appears to harness the chimerical concept of community to the rhetoric of a tenants’ movement organised around a conception of social housing as a public good. Retaining elements of the nostalgic narrative associated with the concept of community, the frame expresses social relations under threat, public space lost and local facilities under attack. The defence of social housing does not appear here as lost cause but as a practical strategy of place or a territorial expression of social justice. This territorialisation of social policy by tenants is explained by Stella Capek and John Gilderbloom in their discussion of the tenants’ movement in the United States:

‘Tenants must be understood as urban social actors linked to particular conceptions of space. The importance of space or territoriality for tenants’
movements is striking since they lay their claims according to a reinterpretation of spatial justice.’ (Capek & Gilderbloom 1992: 5).

The evocation of a sense of place, and especially claims on public space, can be the building blocks of collective identities (Tilly 2003), and can be harnessed by marginalised social groups to define themselves and to develop a subjectivity (Staeheli & Mitchell 2007). This is identity work in which space becomes charged with political claims. In his study of homelessness protests, Talmadge Wright (1997) called this spatial process of identity construction ‘placemaking’, a term familiar to the planning profession, to suggest the opposition to strategies of urban governance that are conveyed by ‘poor people’s movements’. The tenants’ movement has been linked, perhaps tenuously, to the contemporary demand for the ‘Right to the City’ (Lefebvre 1996), in which a range of anti-capitalist struggles express themselves through conflict over urban space, ‘over who should have the benefit of the city and what kind of city it should be’ (Mayer 2009: 367). This association draws on Manuel Castells’ (1983: 319) characterisation of tenants as an urban social movement agitating for a city organised around use value ‘in contradiction to the notion of the city for profit’. To claim the right to the city is to claim the power to shape justice spatially; to demand ‘the fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them’ (Soja 2008: 3). The ‘Community Ownership’ frame constructs a spatial identity where claims of rights and justice are made territorial and where mass social housing is defended as a geographically-located associational relationship, its attributes of mutual aid and co-operation are enacted, and made visible in public space. The defence of a universal model of rented housing is also the process of reclaiming public space from the individualising effects of privatisation.

This chapter has analysed the process whereby tenants rearticulate and resignify the dominant performative of participation to construct the outline of a social movement. The performative voice, that expression of idealised market forces released into the public housing sector, carries with it excluded meanings that can be recruited to amend the dominant model of participation and bring back elements of collective action, democracy and the traditions of a social movement to a regulated process. These returning identities provide the outline of a tenants’ movement, one that takes on explicit and contentious form in the construction of a collective action frame that provides it with a cause, a location
and a sense of purpose. The defining diagnostic frame of this tenants’ movement champions social housing as a universal service and realigns dominant and governmental frames around community and locality to express combative beliefs of co-operative traditions and discourses of mobilisation. It portrays a movement motivated by a sense of territorial justice and grounded in an embattled notion of public space. The next chapter explores two further frames that clarify the values of the movement and delineate its boundaries.
Chapter 7
Tenant Frames of Collective Action

An imaginary tenants’ movement appears in the performative enactment of participation, conveyed in a language of universal rights and tinged with the antagonism of labour and class narratives. Within these boundary markers, a process of identity construction can be discerned in which shared interests are framed around a powerful notion of community and social housing. This frame is diagnostic in that it provides a movement with its causal understanding of where it comes from and what it believes in. The movement that emerges from the ‘Community Ownership’ frame is constituted in a contentious connection between public space, community action and adherence to a vanished model of social housing. This is a movement dedicated to fostering territories of mutuality and co-operation, that defines itself through its housing tenure and the spatial traditions and values of social rights, and that pursues collective action as an essential attribute of neighbourhood identity.

The movement remains ill-defined, however. Its constitutive frame is a re-articulation of dominant discourses around community and active citizenship, and, while this ‘collective packaging device’ (Snow 2004: 400) has directly oppositional aspects, it is oriented on hegemonic beliefs and reducible, in parts, to them. The frame elaborates common cause in a collective adherence to social housing, and assumes a shared sense of identification based on space and class but a tenants’ movement has yet to distinguish itself from ‘them’: the opposition, the sources of injustice; it has yet to demarcate itself from dominant power relations, to manifest antagonism and display a desire for change. Something more is needed to turn this amorphous assemblage of shared identifications into a social movement with a message.

David Snow and Robert Benford (1988) maintained that collective action frames perform three core tasks, and that in addition to a diagnostic frame, prognostic and motivational discourses were necessary in the formation of a social movement. A prognostic frame constructed ‘a proposed solution to the diagnosed problem that specifies what needs to be done’ while the motivational
frame functions as ‘a call to arms or rationale for engaging in ameliorative or corrective action’ (Snow & Benford 1988: 199). This chapter analyses and presents two further frames that give a tenants’ movement dynamism and an antagonistic edge and provide both prognostic and mobilising outcomes. Firstly it explores the construction of cultural identifications in tenant claims made about the value of experiential knowledge pitted against professional status and power, and secondly, it analyses the construction of an image of organisational structure and movement identity in the promotion of participatory and direct democracy. These frames construct meanings for tenants around power and knowledge, democracy and collective action and illustrate the emergence of a ‘collective oppositional consciousness’ (Taylor 1989: 771) from a resignification of participation discourse.

**Experts in the field**

Hilary Wainwright (1994: 2) argued that a distinctive and recurring theme in the history of social movements since the late 1960s has been ‘the questioning and overturning of the character and organisation of what counted as valid knowledge’. This has been especially true in the mobilisation of welfare state users who have championed their experiential knowledge against the professional assessments of need in health, social care and housing. ‘These movements questioned the definition of what counts as knowledge, the narrowness of the sources of knowledge considered relevant to public policy, the restricted categories of people whose knowledge was valued and the processes by which knowledge is arrived at,’ Wainwright said (2003: 23). This critique was rarely expressed overtly and was discovered in the consciousness-raising of the women’s movement and in the self-organisation of welfare users as they shared experiences and expressed their own needs and preferences. In championing experiential knowledge, these movements began to challenge the authority of welfare state managers to know what was good for them, and to act in their best interests. They sought to speak for themselves rather than let others speak for them (Croft & Beresford 1996). They developed a discursive frame around knowledge that questioned the power relations of the welfare state and became an affront to the status of professionalism. For some movements this frame generated a demand for democratic control over public resources; for
others it presented a model of new social relations between users and providers. The dynamic of this challenge to knowledge stemmed from a basis in self-organisation. It was in service users getting together and sharing personal experiences that experiential knowledge gained its power. Through their autonomous organisations welfare state users could begin to assert alternative models of service, and particular definitions of need, and formulate more inclusive and more equitable policies (Wainwright 1994). In constructing a legitimate space for their own deliberation around personal experience, these ‘subaltern counter-publics’ (Fraser 1997: 81) could start to frame their own needs, objectives and strategies.

This frame of experiential knowledge manifests itself among 66 per cent of the focus groups and interviews in a strong repudiation of the knowledge of housing professionals and a challenge to their right to make operational decisions concerning social housing neighbourhoods. Figure 2 sets out a diagrammatic snapshot of the frame ‘Challenging Power and Knowledge’. One strand addresses issues of power relations in social housing, and assembles discourses and narratives that pose a challenge to the privileged status of housing professionals. The movement for tenant management and tenant control connects these themes to the second strand: a strongly expressed set of beliefs around the experiential knowledge of tenants; the third strand articulates criticisms of remote and unresponsive housing management practices. This frame is rooted in the dominant discourse of participation where the assertion is commonly made that the residents of an area know best about its needs (see for example Hazel Blears, then Secretary of State for Communities, in CLG 2007c: 3). A process of frame bridging tints this discourse with a spirit of combative antagonism to imbue the ‘Challenging Power and Knowledge’ frame with the frustration of tenants’ organisations whose aspirations ‘to get things done on their estates’ (Craddock 1975: 94) have been continually blocked by the power relations of housing management.

The incorporation of local knowledge into professional decision-making is considered a key outcome for participation processes. Local people’s knowledge is expected to improve the quality of the decisions taken by elites (Hague 1990), or its adoption is thought to empower residents through a reversal of hierarchies (Mosse 2001). The extraction of local knowledge, however, takes place within
Figure 2: Frame of Challenging Power & Knowledge

**Challenging Power & Knowledge**
(in 66% of focus groups & interviews)

**Taking Power**
‘Power isn’t something that someone can give people, you’ve got to take it’

- Reversing power relations
  ‘Tenants should be telling them’

- ‘We challenge and we question’
- ‘A bit higher up than what we were’

**Doing it for Ourselves**
‘Have housing run the way we want it’

- Tenant management & control
- ‘It does give tenants power’

**Experiential knowledge**
‘The people who know what’s happening in social housing are the people living in it’

- ‘We’re experts in the field because we live there’
- ‘No-one can know more about a person’s home than the person living in it’
- ‘They don’t know what goes on within estates’

**Challenging the Professionals**
‘We know more about the needs of the community’

- ‘They’ve never lived in social housing’
- ‘They’re left in the middle trying to sort it out’
- ‘Resident to resident they will open up and say more to us’
- ‘They knock on your door. They stop you in the street’

**Demand for locally-based housing services**
systems and spaces mediated, if not controlled, by professionals, who establish what knowledge is considered legitimate, how it should be communicated, and what uses will be made of it, as indicated in Chapter 5. The frame of ‘Challenging Power and Knowledge’ establishes counter-social relations for the production of local knowledge. In this frame housing professionals are characterised as poor learners, and their mediation is rejected. The informal conversations of residents in the lived spaces of housing estates are presented instead as the location of better decision-making.

At a TPAS conference discussion in 2009, Maisie makes this claim to experiential knowledge on behalf of social housing tenants and uses it to position them as best placed to manage their own housing:

Maisie: The people who know what’s happening in social housing are the people who live in it and consequently if they can tell it or show it or deal with it then obviously they’re going to be able to fix it.

Elizabeth: We’re experts in the field because we live there.

Maisie: Well exactly, we have the experience of living in the houses, of living in the community and um, I think there can be no one who can know more about the person’s home, than the person living in it.

This assertion of privileged knowledge by tenants is based on their direct experience of living in a neighbourhood and seeing what goes on both night and day. Housing officers, in contrast, are perceived as office-bound and only on the estate in daylight hours, if it all. Cheryl continued the discussion in the focus group and amplified the frame, saying:

The thing is the people who are in a community, who live there, they can see what’s going on. I mean we can look across the street and see that there’s a gang of youngsters hanging out and, you know, in a certain area. We can see, you know, that people can’t walk through an alley way or something, so when it comes to the actual environment or the community as such the people who are the local residents will be the ones who will have more experience of what’s going on around there. The professionals will be in their offices wherever that may be so they haven’t got the actual knowledge or sight or feeling of what’s happening around your community and when it comes to the housing itself the
question is, who knows more about the needs of their community than the housing professionals? We do know more because we’re actually in that community, living it, as compared to someone who may have had a report from the police or, or a tenants association or something, and hear about an incident, we’re there living it 24/7. We do know more.

The claim is further developed through the assertion that tenants display a concern and commitment for the neighbourhood and its well-being that housing professionals do not share. As Georgia says:

We see what they turn a blind eye to. We see what’s wrong with our community and we pass it on to them. They, they, ah, they just say, well they say they listen and it will be done, but its forgotten about and therefore it gets turned a blind, a blind eye to until we will keep reminding them and we have to keep doing this until we get it done. And that’s why we are more experienced than what they are: because we see it all the time.

Housing professionals are characterised by their remoteness and their indifference to estate problems. They are criticised for the slowness of their response. They have to be prodded and reminded by tenants before they will act. From an assertion of the primacy of experiential knowledge, the focus group frame has become overtly antagonistic. Each negative attribute alleged against housing professionals is another boundary marker constructing ‘them’ against ‘us’.

Marcie: I think we know more about the needs of the community and tenants than housing professionals unless you’re lucky enough to get a housing professional who is willing to listen, and I mean listen, not, I, I often hear this phrase ‘I hear what you say’, well they’d have to be deaf if they didn’t but they hear what you say and take no notice. We want professionals that hear what we say and listen.

We pay their wages

Having undercut the claim of the housing profession to privileged knowledge, and lambasted the housing service for its remoteness, its unwillingness to listen to
tenants and its lack of responsiveness, this increasingly strident frame becomes a statement of class antagonism with its imagery of the shop floor and its opposition to management. Without direct experience of poverty and hardship housing professionals cannot hope to understand the lives of social housing tenants, it is argued. Housing officers have expressed the social distance between them and their tenants; David Clapham, Bridget Franklin and Lise Saugeres (2000:73) quoted one professional saying tenants and staff ‘were on two different planets’. Tenants maintain here that housing staff are spatially separate, living parallel lives, unable and unwilling to bridge the experiential gap between them and tenants.

Cheryl: You’re dealing with people who have a very good wage coming in; they’ve never been poor, never been out of work, never had to deal with the benefits system etc.

Marcie: I think that all housing officers and especially directors should be forced to live in social housing for at least a month before they take up the positions they’ve got, so they might see what its like to live in social housing because a lot of them have not got a clue

Cheryl: They should go back to the floor

Marcie: They’ve never lived in social housing and they haven’t got a clue what it means. They’ve come into these jobs and they’ve lived in private houses, they’ve got good salaries, they don’t know what its like to struggle, they’ve never had housing benefits, they’ve never had to claim anything. They don’t know what goes on within estates where there’s problems and it would do them good to live there for a month or so and see what the problems are amongst the people they are working for; at the end of the day they’re working for us.

In this partisan statement the collective action frame sets out its fundamental challenge to the power relations implicit in professional knowledge. It is tenants who commission the housing management service and tenants who know best what they need. They pay for the service through their rents, so why are they not in charge?

Cheryl: We employ them, we employ them, we pay their wages

Robert: That’s right

Cheryl: We pay their wages: they’re accountable to us.
This imagined reversal of power relations, provides the motivation behind the establishment of tenant management organisations, where an elected tenant board is allocated a budget for their estate and directly employs and manages its own housing staff to operate a localised service. Tenant management has been a central feature of housing policy since the mid-1970s and has constituted one of the main drivers for ‘exit’ in the sector (Boaden et al 1982). Funding has been available since 1986, under Section 16 of the Housing and Planning Act, to support tenants who are interested in exploring management options and to help them develop a tenant management organisation. Since 1994 council tenants have had a statutory Right to Manage while in 2008 grants were made available to help housing association tenants explore voluntary management options (CLG 2007a). An assessment of tenant management organisations carried out by Liz Cairncross and colleagues from Oxford Brookes University (2002) reported there were 202 tenant management organisations and another 81 in development, covering 84,000 homes. The research showed that most tenant management organisations performed better than their host local authorities and that overall they were managing as well as the top quarter of local authorities in terms of housing performance.

Tenant empowerment grant, as Section 16 funding is now known, is also available to support tenant-led stock transfer and the appearance in 2003 of a mutual model of housing association, the Community Gateway, a housing company committed to exporting tenant management and purportedly tenant-led (CCH 2003), evidenced awareness among housing professionals that tenants were uncomfortable with the loss of accountability inherent to the unrelenting programme of demunicipalisation. Commenting on the escalating number of stock transfer associations and arms-length management organisations, the Chartered Institute of Housing (2006) noted: ‘tenants often feel that they do not have sufficient influence over their housing, particularly when big decisions are being taken.’ Since the launch of Preston Community Gateway in 2005, there have been five more stock transfers to mutual associations which, with their tenant membership, community options studies and elected boards, bring the community ownership model dominant in Scottish housing policy into the English housing landscape (Clapham & Kintrea 2000, McKee 2007). Maisie’s contribution to the focus group exchange above was rooted in her ardent endorsement of the Community Gateway model:
It’s tenant led, ah, there is a committee of tenants that puts the views, needs and wants of all the tenants to the board. The board also is made up of tenants as well as, as others, and I think that, that’s really empowered residents to run their community, have housing run the way they want it, to have, you know, repairs done on time.

Throughout her focus group discussion, Maisie enthusiastically promoted the Gateway model as a strategy for challenging the power of the housing profession and putting tenants in charge:

You know to me it was just something I think all tenants should have wherever they live, across the country, I would love to see that happen, because we’re the ones who pay that rent, the ones, you know these are, these, these are our homes, you know, and why should the money that we are paying not, we don’t have any control over how it’s being spent?

Much of the incentive for tenants to take over the management of their estates, and challenge the relations of power in their housing companies stems from their desire to institute a localised service, where housing staff have a direct relationship with tenants and are based at an accessible neighbourhood office. The development of a business and performance culture in housing organisations has triggered a withdrawal of this local service in many areas. Neighbourhood housing offices are closed down and staff centralised in specialist teams while customer services are delivered through contact centres. This remote working mirrors private sector practices developed in the financial services and home shopping industries and is expected to reduce costs and improve business efficiency and service quality (Walker 2000). There is a conflict, however, between the culture of efficient call management necessary to a contact centre and the personal relations required in a social welfare service and tenants complain that housing officers are less visible on the estates, reinforcing their complaints of an unresponsive service.

Sara pioneered a tenant-led stock transfer for her estate because she wanted to reinstate a local housing service. Things were so bad in her area that you couldn’t even get a pizza delivered there, she says.
When we used to say to [...] council, they wouldn’t believe how bad our estate was going, because you wouldn’t see an estate manager come out from the town hall in [...] out to where we are, you know. And we used to say “just spend one night in the flat and you’ll see what we’re talking about; you’ll see the drug addicts, you’ll see the drunks and everything else”. But they wouldn’t do that. But now we’ve got an office smack bang in the middle of the estate, it’s on the bottom of one of our blocks of flats. Now the people don’t have to go all the way into [...], you know, £5 bus ride, to report something. They just walk down the stairs, or across the green, into the office, you know and it’s dealt with there and then.

Managing your own estate means doing the ‘hiring and firing’ as Sara makes clear. It means being in control of the staff and directing the housing service to the priorities and standards set by the residents – the people with the local knowledge. Despite having a local housing office and accessible staff, Sara maintains that it is the tenants’ organisation that does the lion’s share of the work; after all they are there day and night.

At the end of the day the housing officers can leave the office and go away. The two people we employ in the housing office, which is in the middle of the estate, live nowhere near it. You know, they go off and “we’ll see you tomorrow” or “we’ll see you Monday” but you’re left in the middle, trying to sort it out, you know.

This is the curious position of the expert tenant: stuck in the middle, not professional but not quite amateur; ‘strategic brokers’ (Larner & Craig 2005), trying to patch together partnerships between community and professionals. It is an uneasy role navigated by the members of autonomous tenant organisations who try to negotiate acceptance by housing staff of their identities, interests and needs (Fraser 1997). Even when they do not have any managerial authority, tenants’ associations try to build a partnership with patch-based housing staff and ‘train them’ by inducting them into the domestic knowledge that only a resident can claim. These attempts by tenants’ organisations to build deliberative relationships with housing management staff are routinely shattered in the restructures of housing organisations.
I think we know more about our communities because professionals move on and we stay

Barbara says, and, recording the frustration of residents associations when the partnership they develop with operational staff is broken with such disregard, she adds, ‘and then we have to start all over again and train, train them into their new position.’

Participation often results, David Mosse (2001: 21) argues, not in professionals adopting local knowledge in their decision making, but in locals acquiring professional knowledge to promote their concerns. An education in professional discourse can enable tenants to claim both the housing insider’s knowledge of systems, and the residents’ privileged understanding of space. They can boast ‘not only knowledge of communities but also knowledge about communities’ as Wendy Larner and David Craig (2005: 418) observe. While Larner and Craig associate the professionalisation of tenant activists with a loss of ‘oppositional voices’, the acquisition of elite knowledge by activists can serve to undermine the power of those elites. Tenant inspectors, Kevin and John have been trained to make qualitative assessments of housing management procedures in their voluntary scrutiny role. When they visit housing offices they observe that the staff appear threatened by the challenge to their power and knowledge.

Kevin: When I go there they say “why don’t you get a job here”. I think the fear is, is that we seem to know more.

John: Know more than the staff.

Jane, a member of a tenants’ panel, also claims superior knowledge for residents in their possession of both professional and experiential truths.

We have more knowledge about what’s going on in housing than many of our officers, and certainly most of our councillors.

In demanding an equal role for experiential knowledge in decision-making, tenants appear to advocate a participatory model of management (Barnes 1999). They argue that their direct experience enables them to constructively contribute to housing
management decisions. When a deliberative relationship is denied them, their frustration turns to antagonism and they frame themselves as best able to manage their homes. Their challenge to the dominance of professional knowledge speaks of a power reversal that is expressed cogently by Gina, a regional tenants' federation member:

We no longer have to tip our forelock, say yes sir, no sir, three bags full sir, because what the government did, they educated us, so now we challenge and we question and that is what the problem is that the government can't accept that we’re a bit more educated, a bit more knowledgeable and we have the ability to question and challenge.

Local knowledge appears in this frame as an unproblematic ‘common sense’ acquired by residency. This experiential knowledge claimed by tenant directors and the members of tenant organisations does not admit of the social structures and power relations of the localities through which it is generated (Kothari 2001). It imagines the housing estate as a forum for tidy decision-making and housing procedures for dealing with ‘the drug addicts’ and ‘the drunks’, for instance, are uncritically accepted as tools to be put into action, rather than as the constructions of elite power and knowledge themselves. How a diversity of local ‘knowledges’ might be represented by tenants, and how power relations might be scrutinised in housing services are the subjects of the third frame, which provides the motivational dynamic for a tenants’ movement in the principles of direct democracy.

Democracy from below

Concepts of participatory or direct democracy (Pateman 1970, Held 2006), embedded in tenant participation, convey a radical critique of the organisation of housing services and seek to transform the power relations of social housing policy which identify tenants as ‘second class citizens’. In 1968 tenants' organisations became involved in participation schemes to make their estates better places, and thought the way to do this was to build a partnership with willing housing managers, to gain more power over operational decision-making and change attitudes among housing staff. This strategy was expressed in terms of the rights of citizenship: 'It is the democratic right of people whose lives are so fundamentally affected by the
actions of public bodies to be able to represent their feelings and to influence, if not make, decisions which affect their immediate environment’ (Craddock 1975: 20). In using this language of rights, tenants were consciously, or unconsciously, positioning themselves alongside other social movements for whom participation had become a philosophy expressed through direct action in the belief that ‘the people themselves must assume direct responsibility for intervening in the political decision-making process’ (Della Porta & Diani 2006: 240).

A commitment to grassroots involvement in decision-making and self-determination emerged out of the Civil Rights movement in the United States, was embraced in the student uprising in Europe and the USA and found enthusiastic endorsement in the feminist movement, where participatory democracy was applied as an organisational process as well as being championed as a motor of social change. Social movements pillaged the works of Rousseau and Marx to define participatory democracy as a ‘commitment to surmount the usual barriers of status, a commitment on the part of the participants to treat each other as equals, not by dividing power up equally, but by fostering each person’s self-development’ (Polletta 2002: 128). The theory was applied to reinterpret all social institutions; workers’ co-operatives, food co-operatives, health care collectives were established and experimented with consensus decision-making to run their affairs. Only through the intervention of new forms of popular participation at a local level could the State be held accountable, society democratised, and everyday life transformed (Pateman 1970).

While little remains of these social movements and the culture of participation that they constructed, discourses of direct democracy, collective representation and contentious challenge are synonymous with the concept of the tenants’ movement. Figure 3 represents a snapshot of the frame of ‘Real Democracy’ as it appears across 76 per cent of the research groups and interviews. Its principle strand is organisational, and sets out a commitment to the principles of direct democracy: the election of mandated representatives, accountability and recall. Central to the frame is a belief in collective action and the potential for autonomous tenant organisations to generate their own views and policies. This is allied to the traditions of a social movement and a sense of a tenants’ movement with its own history.
Figure 3: Frame of Real Democracy

Real Democracy
(in 76% of focus groups & interviews)

Delegate Structure
‘Delegates try very hard to take it back and consult up’
‘You represent the people on the ground’
Accountability
‘You’re their voice and you’re accountable to them’
‘You go back to them and say do you agree?’

Recall
‘If you continually speak for yourself you won’t get elected next time’

Election
‘It’s the tenants out there what voted for each and every member’

Constructive Challenge
‘Representative groups can challenge’

‘We’re the only ones who actually can offer constructive discussion’

‘Just the usual suspects’
‘We want to widen it out but they widen it out to get the kind of people they want’

Privilege to Serve
‘Advocating for people who don’t know their rights’

Strength in numbers
‘If you haven’t got a tenants association you haven’t a leg to stand on’

‘If you have feisty people who challenge, they don’t want to hear them do they?’

Collective Voice
‘Tenants as a movement – we want to change things – a united voice’

‘We’re dedicated to us tenants and we fight for us tenants’

Power to get things changed
‘We just need to be joined as one voice to get things changed’

‘Any movement’s got to get to the top as they did in Chartism in the Victorian days’
‘In their concern with democracy from below or direct democracy […] a bottom-up, grassroots version of democracy’ (Greg 2004: 29), the tenants’ movement has been distinctive in its approach to organisational behaviour, while its commitment to participation in housing policy appears motivated by a desire to extend ‘democracy into the very nature of welfare provision’ (Bolger et al 1981: 26). Its guiding principles are set out by Najinder, at a regional federation meeting:

What I feel is, if there should be a general trend is, the consultation process, or whatever is to be agreed upon, should start at the grass roots and then be taken forward as we go along, then you, you will get effective participation.

Brian, the vice chair of a tenants’ federation explains the values that guide his organisation. His federation is an umbrella body of tenants and residents associations, known by the acronym TARAs. These tenants and residents associations are the membership bodies of the federation, and the federation executive or management committee is elected and held accountable by the membership through regular general meetings. The principle of collective representation runs through the horizontal structure from the local association, through the federation, and, as Brian make clear, extends to a national organisation and onto the international tenants’ body.

If you’re a TARA you’ve got a bigger voice; instead of one tenant shouting you’ve got the whole TARA, and not only that with the TARAs being affiliated to the association, because this office here isn’t our office we only manage it on behalf of the TARAs, it’s their office really. And we pay a donation to what you call Taroe, that’s Tenants & Residents of all England. They pay a fee to the European one which covers the whole of the world, so the tenant’s voice will be heard all over the world, you see, so it’s a good thing. That’s why we push for TARAs, you know.

This federal structure of an international social movement is founded on the democratic principles of election, accountability, and a commitment to consensus decision-making. These values appear to have been marginalised in
contemporary tenant participation processes where landlords have turned instead to market research techniques in which the selection of individuals by housing officers has become the preferred method of recruitment. While the earliest participation schemes involved elected tenants’ organisations in housing management decision-making (Richardson & Wiles 1977), the contemporary make-up of participation appears to have by-passed the notion of collective representation. Traditional tenants’ organisations now contrast their democratic model of participation with the focus group and informal tenant panels of their landlord. Jane, at a regional federation, comments:

I think that there actually has to be a democratic structure. So the people who are speaking know they’re accountable to the people they’re speaking for [...] I mean, for example, we, nobody in our borough can get to the tenants council without having been elected first from their tenants association, then from there to their area forum, from their area forum they go to, so there’s a democratic structure and every year you have an AGM, every year you have to show your accounts

In the democratic model of participation, the tenants who engage with their landlords represent a defined community; they have been elected and entrusted by that community to represent their views. Michael, a member of a tenants’ association, contrasts this with the selection of individuals who contribute only their own experience to focus groups, or with the selection by interview of tenant directors to the boards of housing companies where they are prohibited from representing any constituency.

It’s just going to be individuals, individuals, individuals all the time. Speaking on behalf of who? Themselves. In the old days, you know, groups would speak on behalf of the 2-300 members of the community they represent. And I think that’s a very simple ethos. You know, you’re not there to represent yourself. We want, not I want.

The ethos of collective representation, in which elected representatives speak for their electorate and are subject to recall if they lose the trust of their voters, is the essence of the tenants’ movement imagined by Jane, and put into action in her federation:
If you continually speak for yourself you won’t get elected next time round, you know, or if you speak for yourself and people quite like you speaking for yourself because they agree with you, well then that’s alright, do you know what I mean? You can’t necessarily consult on every question at every moment with the people on the ground but you represent them, and you go back to them and say I said that and do you agree, and do you support me or whatever.

Criticisms of tenants’ organisations on grounds of representation have centred on the make-up of their committees, which often appear not to mirror the diversity of their neighbourhood, being ‘highly ethnocised and gendered’ (Uguris 2004: 123), and characteristically made up of older residents, with most being over the age of 50. In contrast Liz Millward et al (2003: 39) suggest that a more useful indicator of diversity would be how inclusive and accessible are tenant organisations, with the focus on the steps they take to clear away barriers to wider involvement; ‘it is impossible to get everyone involved or to have a single truly representative organisation,’ Millward comments.

Responding to the accusation, commonly levelled by housing professionals, that the members of traditional, elected tenants organisations are the ‘usual suspects’, Jane argues:

We want to widen it out, but they widen it out to get the kind of people they want, and the thing about a tenants association is that everybody on the estate potentially can come to the tenants association, so potentially you are consulting with all of them and you’re their voice and you’re answerable to them.

The organisational structure of local tenants’ associations and tenants’ federations reflects at its core the ethos of direct democracy where the guiding principle is the need to ensure that the constituents have direct control over the aims, actions and activities of the leadership. This is a characteristic of tenants organisations that ensures ‘working class interests can both be mobilised and remain dominant in the carrying out of a particular campaign’, as Steve Bolger and his radical social work colleagues maintained (Bolger et al 1981: 144).
Sanjit appears to confirm this labour movement allusion, likening the process of decision-making at his federation to the negotiations of a trade union.

Everybody here is an elected representative of a residents association, or a tenants association somewhere. And we come together and we agree things by consensus. I like to use my old, I used to be a shop steward in the film technicians union and I always used to say in meetings: “I’m sorry; I can’t take that back to my members” ((laughs)). So whenever I’m in meetings I always try and think like that, Okay, can I get, would I, can I get anybody else on my estate to agree to this, no? Well I can’t agree to it, even if I think it’s a good idea ((laughs)). That, that’s real democracy.

Not all decisions can be taken by consensus at a general assembly and the role of the representative in direct democracy is always problematic. Peter Somerville (2005b) distinguishes between representation in the political meaning of taking decisions at a higher level, and, what he calls ‘functional’ representation on higher-level bodies whose purpose is to support local decision-making. The example Somerville uses is of the secondary housing co-operative that may provide administration, finance and legal services to the primary co-operative in which authority is still vested and whose members make decisions directly. The tenant-led housing association Watmos, providing an asset ownership structure and administrative support to eight tenant management organisations in Walsall, exemplifies this direct democracy in the tenants’ movement (Watmos Community Homes 2010). Adherence to the underlying principle of direct democracy means that tenants’ organisations at levels above the local association are tasked with ensuring the primacy of local decision-making, as these Federation committee members illustrate:

Brian: It’s the tenants out there what voted for each and every member on this Federation for them where they are today so it’s up to them to represent the tenants out there of the whole of […] borough for putting them where they are today

Eileen: It’s not what we want

Brian: It’s what they want
The theme of accountability is central to a debate within tenants’ organisations about the effectiveness of the movement’s leaders. In a structure that is primarily focused on the local neighbourhood, the relevance of national, regional or borough-wide federations is constantly under question and participants are noticeably wary of organisational structures which involve hierarchy or centralised organisation. In the following exchange, members of a tenants’ federation criticise the leadership of the national organisation Taroe, but the same complaints could, no doubt, be heard about the federation from its local tenants’ associations.

Eileen: So what you need is the representative bodies that we have, anywhere in this, need to be representative and give their views,

Harry: Yes

Eileen: And also I think they need a revolution to get them back into something like order

((Laughs and jokes))

Moderator: So you’re looking for better representation then? Or

Eileen: No our reps need to do their job.

In the horizontal structure imagined in the concept of the tenants’ movement, John says that tenant representatives:

Carry with them a big responsibility to speak not as an individual but to reflect the views and concerns of the tenants […] and not their own views. It must not be a personal agenda.

John, a member of a borough-wide federation, considers the qualities of its representatives to be one of the weaknesses of the movement.

The problem for the people who are put in charge for the tenants’ movement is that they have to be accountable. And at this moment in time is there a lack of accountability? Question mark. [Pause] I think there is.
This emphasis on grass roots democracy and accountable representation may appear somewhat ironic given studies of tenants’ associations that have analysed the splits, feuds, and lack of support enjoyed by local committees (Ravetz 2001). It is clear from Leslie Andrews’ (1979) account that some association committees only represent the views of their extended network of families and friends, and that tenants elected to represent a defined constituency may only ever speak for themselves. It would be easy to accuse the advocates of this frame of ‘Real Democracy’ of double standards, of failing to practise what they preach. All social movements are guilty of this, William Gamson (1991: 47) argues: ‘accounts by movement participants about the quality of social relationships in their movement have a tendency to be idealised, sometimes reflecting wishful thinking about how things ought to be.’

Wishful thinking it may be, but tenants like John are extremely critical of organisational practice that fails to live up to the democratic ideals expressed in this frame. Effective representation is essential to the success of the tenants’ movement, John believes, and, far from defending closed organisations that make little effort to encourage diversity or reflect a wide range of views, tenants in this study were adamant that the implementation of a democratic model depended on a commitment to the role of representative.

Mick: One of the main things that, er, er, affects tenant relationship with the, er, housing department, is the quality and strength of the representatives

Sarjit: Yeah

Mick: If you’ve got poor representation, then you’ll get poor results, the stronger your representation to the housing department, then you will achieve something because (. ) umm, they with their tongue in their cheek, they will try to do what is, to them, the best and easiest thing to do, which is not necessarily the same for the tenant

Jane does not see this problem as unique to the tenants’ movement:

Like all those, like all situations how much you actually get down to the roots on the ground is dependent on the people who are doing the representing, or have been elected. You know, some (. ) tenants,
delegates try very hard to take it back, and then consult up, and what we basically try and do in the […] Tenants [Federation].

Election as an officer of a tenants’ organisation places responsibility on the office holder to accurately reflect the views of residents in a defined area. Mina thinks of her position as an elected official of a tenants’ federation committee as a privileged role:

You’re advocating for people who in most parts are not aware of their rights, are not knowing what they are entitled to.

Clare, chair of her tenants association, also feels the responsibilities of the role:

That’s what my job is to do – to challenge, on behalf of all the people in the area. If police are turning up, if police aren’t coming, then it’s my job. It’s me what has to put their head above the parapet.

While housing providers have configured the question of representation as one of demographics, tenants argue that being representative is a matter of maintaining day to day contact with local residents. The fact that people like Clare and Mina live in the area they represent and are well known in their locality is vital to the ideal of grass roots democracy promoted in this model of a tenants’ movement. It ensures that they can be mandated and held to account. Brian says:

You go home and you’ve got them knocking on your door. I have to be careful because I’m on call seven days a week, you know, really. I mean I had a text last night, when are you having another coffee morning, I thought we’ve just got over one, give us a chance to pull ourselves together and get organised, you know, but this is how they are.

It is the accessibility of elected tenant representatives that ensures they are accountable; as Sara says, she cannot avoid her constituents; she is always on call.
I mean we’ve only got 394 properties on our estate and everybody knows who’s on the board and you get stopped, they knock on your door, they stop you in the street. You cannot get away from them.

The impression of a grass-roots movement, whose leaders are motivated by a sense of duty, and are forced into accountability by their very localism, conjures up a combative image in the identity talk of tenants. In this discourse tenant democracy and accountability oppose themselves to the ‘democratic deficit’ in housing organisations and become the keywords of a contentious and autonomous tenant ‘voice’.

**Politics into the streets**

The rise of housing associations as the main providers of social housing concerns has been dogged by concerns over a loss of democratic accountability. Opposition to the stock-transfer of council housing has focused on the loss of local democratic representation in housing governance. Even arms-length management companies, although owned by the local authority, are run by appointed boards, or the new magistracy as these un-elected directors have been called (Clarke & Stewart 1994). In their commitment to deepening democracy through direct and participatory models of decision-making, the tenants’ movement confronts the withdrawal of democratic practices in housing organisations. The mutual Community Gateway model was introduced to renew democratic lines of accountability in stock transfer housing associations, and Maisie, a Community Gateway director, flaunts both company law and the injunctions of the Audit Commission (2004a) to maintain that the democratic election of tenant board members empowers them as representatives rather than company directors:

I had to campaign to be elected and consequently it went borough-wide you know, all the candidates who wanted to be elected as tenant candidates had to give a reason why they want that and how they felt, what they brought to that, what they were bringing to the committee would be beneficial to the whole borough and then, everyone in that borough was ah, you know, cast a vote for or against or not for that person and I
was elected onto there which I feel very proud of because I have spoken
to residents to represent them, to represent their views and it is absolutely
important that they know that when you speak to them you are going to go
to the committee and put their views to that committee.

In adhering to democratic principles in housing governance, tenant framing
activity revives debate around electoral accountability in public services and
ignites questions about the ownership, control and responsibilities of social
landlords. Participation, seen as a mechanism for strengthening accountability
through effecting consumer information, representation, and redress, is twinned
in tenant identity talk with democracy, and the ability to elect the governing
board is seen as choice, reinforcing voice. This alliance of political
representation and market-like accountability can be glimpsed in Sara’s
contribution to a TPAS focus group in which she describes the board elections in
her tenant-led housing association:

I think it is very important and I was very proud to be elected by, by the
tenants of my community and it meant that they could see that they had
choice rather than somebody co-opting somebody else on and of course
because they're going to have them because they're going to speak, going
to be on the side of the LA, ALMO, housing association, call it what you
will. So I was very proud to be democratically elected.

Sara frames democratic election as the power to decide, placed in the hands of
the tenants, in opposition to restrictive landlord practices of co-option or
selection. In this way the principles of participatory or direct democracy bring
questions of power back into the regulated hegemony of participation.
‘Representative groups can challenge,’ Claire says. ‘Feisty people who
challenge,’ Jane calls them.

In Sara’s tenant-led housing association this democratic ethos appears to
generate a culture of inclusion in which decision-making is devolved and
participative techniques are applied to ensure that everyone is heard.

We have a community board of 12 people but everything we do we go out
to the tenants first and say well these, you know we can’t, um, we call
them ‘You Decides’ where we put all our questions round the board room and the people come in, if they live in a high rise block, if they live in a low rise, they all get different coloured stickers and, um, this is how we, we run it. So it does work, it does work if you give power to the people.

This is a way of organising in which every participant is valued and, reflecting the participative politics of the New Left and the women’s movement, where one of the core tasks is to foster each person’s self-development (Polletta 2002). Sara continues:

We have people with special needs and that, two of those go around with one of the, um, Service and Performance and they do a block inspection, so, it’s integrating those people to make them feel yes you are valid. I mean we have a lady who comes to our board meetings, she’s in her 50s with, er, learning difficulties but she makes the tea and her highlight last meeting was because we gave her a badge with her name on, you know. So it’s trying to accommodate everybody, making everybody feel that yes you have got something to do, you are a valid member of society.

The subaltern counter-publics that operate through tenants’ organisations present an ideal of direct democracy that distantly reflects the participative organising methods of earlier social movements. John Cowley argued that tenants associations created ‘an open forum, a place for public debate of the immediate issues of concern to the area’. They bring ‘politics into the streets’ (Cowley 1979: 144). The focus on direct democracy allied to a strong sense of territory, recalls Henri Levebvre’s theorisation of urban protests that make the streets into political places and play out politics in a spatial field (Elden 2004). The framing activity of the tenants' movement seeks to give control over organisational direction to the grass roots. It enables Yvonne, who is fiercely critical of her housing provider, to express tenants’ collection action in explicitly contentious language:

I don’t think it’s about giving power to people who don’t have it because they do have it, it’s just making them aware that they’ve got the power to do it, that they can do it, you know, (0.2) getting them to realise that power isn’t something that someone can give people, you’ve got to take it, and,
you know, push. Because it is there, it's whether you decide to use it but it's just telling them they can do it, showing them they can do it and encouraging them to do it.

The idea of a tenants’ movement has been associated with a ‘prefigurative politics’ (Breines 1989: 6) whose goal is to develop a culture where relations of equality and democratic participation are practiced now, in the locality, while also advocated as long term strategic objectives. Prefigurative politics were an explicit theme in the writings of the New Left in the 1960s and in the organisations of the women's movement through the 1970s and 1980s. Their focus was on developing relationships and organisational forms that were egalitarian, non-hierarchical, and developed the confidence and efficacy of participants; in this way the political practice of the movement prefigured the desired society they aimed to bring about. It has been argued that the same themes are visible in the tenants’ movement (Polletta 1999), and Martin Wood (1994: 154) thought the development of tenant management organisations, ownership co-operatives and tenant-run housing associations would ‘experiment with structures which might in some way fulfil some of their longer term goals and prefigure the kind of provision they anticipate may result from wider structural change’ (but see Clapham, Kintrea & Kay 1996 who argue that community ownership is neither a result of radical politics nor a form of it).

Autonomous tenants’ organisations and tenant self-management of housing appear to represent models of direct democracy, and tenant framing activity presents this as a wider political principle for the organisation of public services. The themes of participatory democracy, of egalitarian and non-hierarchical organisation expressed in this tenants’ frame appear intimately connected to the values of community, mutual aid and co-operation advocated in the ‘Community Ownership’ frame, and to the primacy of experiential knowledge and localised decision-making promoted in the frame of ‘Challenging Knowledge and Power’. Frame concepts of deliberative public space, of an idea of community in which mutual aid and co-operation flourish, also appear prefigurative, and draw on particular experiences of the organisation of social housing in specific localities. It could be argued that prefigurative politics are enshrined in the aims of national tenant organisations like the National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations and the Confederation of Co-operative Housing, and that tenant
organisations seeking tenant management and community control, embed these politics in their localities. Focused on live practice rather than future plans, these organisations rarely express their aims as political, or theorise from their direct experience. Instead their prefigurative politics may be implemented and explored through small-scale interactions and everyday sociability; it is more likely to be expressed in emotional terms, and put into action rather than into words (Jupp 2008). An approach to political change that concentrates on the locality and on a vision of associational ties expressed in terms of spatial justice is likely to be constitutionally anti-organisational, as well as reluctant to commit itself to manifestos and strategies. Sustaining national organisations and constructing political programmes are tasks that may be precluded for a social movement dedicated to grass roots democracy acted out in the here and now.

This chapter has analysed two collective action frames discernable in the identity talk of tenants involved in participation; frames that together construct the identification of a tenants’ movement. While a frame of ‘Community Ownership’ defines the movement in mutuality, a defined location and a challenging adherence to social citizenship, the frames explored in this chapter add a sense of antagonism, a desire to reverse power relations, and a set of organisational principles that promote belief in democratic decision-making, participatory governance and direct democracy. These frames establish a contentious philosophy that undermines established hierarchies, and seeks to devolve power to those most immediately affected and those with experiential knowledge. The ability to generate these frames in participation processes is enabled by the failure of the hegemonic model of tenant participation to fully enclose its subjects. The quasi-market performative of voice which is the constituting dynamic of contemporary participation cannot permanently exclude a voice with political and collective meanings from its reiterative practice. Tenants employ voice as a performative to conjure up the imaginary of a movement with a history of collective action, a defined constituency with shared interests and shared fate, and to articulate a process of sustained change. Within these boundary markers, tenants then develop identities expressed in frames around social rights and community, the challenge of experiential knowledge, and democratic and participatory values. These frames are strongly critical of contemporary housing policy; they advocate collective action and express antagonism towards existing power relations in social housing. They suggest a prefigurative politics in which the values of wider societal change are
developed in the local arena. While these collective action frames appear to demarcate the contentious challenge of a social movement, they are constructed through bridging existing dominant frames around community and participatory discourse. These frames are inscribed in the language of existing power relations, and expressed in the vocabulary of the status quo. They construct a social movement inside the regulated practices of participation. This has debilitating consequences for the ability of that movement to mobilise effectively and fundamentally constrains the challenge it presents in housing policy, as the next chapter explores.
Chapter 8
A Domesticated Movement

In the cannon of social movement theory the purpose of collective action frames is to ‘activate adherents, transform bystanders into supporters, exact concessions from targets and demobilise antagonists’ (Snow 2004: 384). They are collective action frames because they provide the ‘guides to action’ that mobilise individuals into a movement, and into a contentious challenge (Tarrow 1992: 177). The primary purpose of framing activity is to break down the justifications of the status quo and to mobilise a new consensus; it is addressed at recruiting new members, spreading new messages, and building a movement (Klandermans 1988). An analysis of the collective action frames constructed by a movement, then, should make clear its ‘dynamics of recruitment and mobilisation’ (Williams 2004: 94).

This chapter extends the analysis of the collective action frames constructed by the research sample to assess their mobilising impact, the strategic aims they indicate, and the contentious action that they trigger. The interpretive frames that define and motivate a tenants’ movement in English social housing are rooted in feelings of stigma and lack of self-worth; the collective disadvantage suffered by all residents of a residual social rented sector. Social movement mobilisation is generated, so Alberto Melucci believed, in the gap between the recognition that a group receives in society and the definition it constructs for itself. ‘Social actors enter a conflict to affirm the identity that their opponent has denied them, to re-appropriate something that belongs to them because they are able to recognise it as their own’ (Melucci 1995: 48). The collective action motivated by negative identifications of social housing tenants, however, is not the insurrection of a social movement but their involvement in the participation schemes of their landlords.

The tenants’ movement is a domesticated movement: it exists in, and through, the regulated processes of participation and it is made intelligible only in the language of participation and according to its rules. What can be called a movement is the expression of a collective and continuous attempt to expand
the boundaries of this regulation, to widen the vocabulary of its voice, and to find exceptions to its rules. This is a social movement with little confidence in itself; seemingly lacking the ability to think strategically; it is divided and fractious. These are not failings or flaws in the tenants’ movement; this subjection to power is what identifies the movement. Participation, it seems, gives the tenants’ movement its power and at the same time embodies in it an inability to realise that power. This chapter discovers submission, vulnerability and dependence as the constituent ingredients of the tenants’ movement and charts the debilitating impact of this subjection on the ability of the movement to mobilise and determine strategy.

We all want the same things

The enactment of a tenants’ movement through framing activity and the performative of voice constructs an emotional edifice rather than a tangible organisation. The movement is expressed as a social network in an idealised litany of common cause, or combatively manifested in the language of struggle and rights. It is conjured up as tradition, a history to be referenced and celebrated, a spirit of possibility, of efficacy, a movement that has momentum, and that slowly and surely evidences progress.

The tenants’ movement is not a phrase commonly applied to reference any specific tenants’ organisations and is not used to describe the national tenants’ organisation, Taroe. It may be used by tenants’ federations to suggest a sense of shared identity across the entirety of tenants engaged in participation, for example Barnsley Federation (2008: 2) says that it ‘co-ordinates the role of the tenant movement within the borough’. This nebulous identity captures an assumption of common cause that is most apparent at events like the TPAS conference, an assembly of over 800 tenants all involved in consultation mechanisms. At the 2008 convention Stephanie defined her sense of the movement as:

It’s just, it is, er, I I think it, it’s (.) It's one big group, passionate group with a common goal to improve [0.3] our homes [0.1] the way we are treated by the government (.) and also the community we live in
Although she attributes three specific goals to the definition of movement, Stephanie’s ‘one big passionate group’ is an emotional identification that conveys the feeling of being present at a convention of like-minded people. At another TPAS focus group in 2009, Barbara again cites the networking that occurs at the convention to indicate a sense of wider unity between tenants:

I always feel amazed when you go to a meeting, er, somewhere perhaps for the first time and you’re meeting a new group of people how you can sit around that table and you can talk, and at the end of it you realise you’re all there for the same reason and that strength I think it g-gives you, well it gives you more strength to carry on because you’re not alone

Although this feeling of movement gives Barbara strength it does so intangibly; she is not describing a relationship of solidarity or shared action. There is no joint response, no agreed strategy arising from these meetings. Barbara returns to her neighbourhood feeling resolved, secure in the knowledge that elsewhere people are also acting alone.

This feeling of distant communion (Bell & Newby 1978) is expressed clearly in the following reflection by the organisers of a borough-wide tenants’ federation on attendance at their public meetings:

Brian: I find it a pleasure when you go to big meetings. When we used to go out to Sally Army hall and you know people used to come, I mean like Margaret from H [Place Name] and a, a couple from M [Place Name], “oh eh up you’re here again”, you know and it’s just a joy, you know, “oh the only time you come is for your fiver”, “oh what you here for?” You know, this is how it is, you have fun and, and it’s great and when they walk in here, “everywhere I go I see you”, and it’s a

Elaine: “Not you again” (Laughs)

Brian: Yeah like that, and it’s so relaxing

Here the federation acts to bring together a network of familiar people and its meetings are sociable occasions for encountering old friends and well-known
faces. The content of the meetings is not a key issue in this narrative, nor is the need for the recruitment of new members. In the place of organisation-building or strategic purpose, there is an emotional identification of common cause that constructs an assumption of unity around aims and objectives. Tenants’ organisational events and conferences amplify the emotional investment, the passion and feelings that Alberto Melucci (1995) defined as key components of the collective identity of a social movement. They appear to act as ‘havens’ (Fantasia & Hirsch 1995) or social settings where these emotional bonds, the ‘hot cognitions’ as William Gamson (1992b) called them, can be nourished.

Mobilising strategies advanced by tenants in this research could be expected to concern recruitment to the membership of organisations, like tenants’ associations or federations, and to justify recruitment into participation processes in order to support a tenant ‘voice’. Discussions of recruitment, however, appear blighted by a lack of movement definition and are conveyed in the same emotion-laden idealism in which the image of the tenants’ movement is itself expressed.

The following catalogue of shared interests is put together by a tenants’ federation to provide a framework for mobilisation:

Julia: No matter what kind of a tenant you are whether you’re housing association or whether (.) you, you live in a council house, or ten-, or council property, eh, we all want the same things

Harry: We have lighting issues

Terri: Yep

Julia: We want a decent home to live in

Terri: Yep

Harry: We have road issues, we have rubbish issues

Terri: Yep

Harry: We all have similar issues. We may have different landlords but we all have the same interests in the environment

Julia: We want a peaceful life (.) No anti-social behaviour.

Eileen: And also homeowners reflected that live in that area that we live in
Ron: It affects everybody

Eileen: It affects everybody

Ron: Irrespective of =

Julia: So it doesn’t matter w-what kind of property you live in, whether as you say being a house owner, or being a tenant, you just want somewhere decent to live and somewhere where you feel safe, (.) and comfortable in your environment.

In this litany of common cause, the definition of a tenants’ movement is extended to all residents irrespective of income, location or any other distinguishing marks. What they all have in common is a need for safety and comfort, although how this shared need is supposed to motivate a diverse population to action is unspecified. It is difficult to believe that this statement is intended to be taken seriously as a mobilisation strategy. However, its lack of precision and vague assumption of unifying bonds is reflected in a TPAS focus group where Karen contributes this optimistic reflection on door-knocking for recruits in her local tenants’ association:

I mean it’s like, yeah, its like when, if you door-knock, most will say “oh god, we’re not interested” but then you say, ah but would you be interested if (.) this was going to happen or that was going to happen and “Well yea:ah, you can’t let that happen!” Well come on then, do something about it.

The mobilisation strategy that is being advanced here is founded on a belief that an intrinsic propensity for collective action lies dormant in communities. This is clearly an extension of the ‘Community Ownership’ frame and its contention that social rented housing carries collectivising and mobilising attributes. Translated into a mobilisation strategy this frame becomes woefully thin with its suggestion of an unbounded movement intrinsically united through invisible bonds across all distinctions of income, wealth, production or consumption. Yet it is possible to see at the core of this frame a reflection of the social base of collective action that Stuart Lowe contended was manifest among the tenants of public housing. In the identity talk of tenants this social base, ‘the common material interests’ shared by a sectoral consumption cleavage, the residents of council housing
(Lowe 1986: 83), has been transposed to the residents of contemporary estates, where a mix of owner-occupation, shared ownership, private renting, and housing association properties has replaced the mono-tenure of Lowe’s council housing thesis.

The effects of housing policies like Right to Buy, and the mixed communities initiative were identified as divisive by tenants constructing the ‘Community Ownership’ frame. It was argued that the effects of privatisation had undermined ties of community, and made it harder for tenants’ organisations to sustain community activities. The advent of multi-tenure social housing estates and a subsequent breakdown of cohesion were identified as obstacles to mobilisation. The stark narrative of lost community expounded in the ‘Community Ownership’ frame demonstrates that all assumptions of shared material interest need to be jettisoned, when these members of a regional federation debate recruitment strategies:

Andrew: There’s a least four different categories of tenants
Richard: Yeah
Andrew: There’s your housing association tenant, council stroke ALMO tenant (0.1). There’s your shared ownership tenant and there’s your leaseholder tenant
Richard: Tenant
Andrew: All have (0.2) slightly different issues
Theresa: Yeah
(0.5)
Richard: Well they all have different issues completely

Attempting to resolve this recruitment impasse, members of this focus group again seize on the more optimistic assumptions of the ‘Community Ownership’ frame about the potential mobilising power of shared public space.

Teresa: You go to focus groups and you’ve got tenants (0.1) you know the community issues that (0.1) the state of the estate is absolutely rife (0.2) there’s anti-social behaviour , you know, we’re sick of the dogs barking
and all of that, there's a lot'll have them common, in common, you know what I mean

Andrew: Yes

Richard: The majority yes

Andrew: Yeah, the community issues yes, uhh, I'll agree completely that we've all got, doesn't have to be on an estate, it can be the nicest private estate going and they've still got anti-social behaviour and [dog fouling]

This credulous belief in common ground, shared even with ‘the nicest private estate’, is the reassuring message advanced in the hegemonic model of participation where divisions of power and status are of no account to rational actors. Participation is in the interests of all, since landlords and tenants share a common interest in improving the housing business; to participate is a good thing (Riseborough 1998). The language of participation policy admits of no structural obstacles to recruitment or mobilisation. On the contrary, taking part is the responsible thing to do and to participate is the act of the citizen. The discourse of responsibility is formative to tenant participation and is built into the identity of the tenants’ movement.

Participation, Barbara Cruikshank (1999) noted, carries with it the principle that individuals should actively pursue their own interests through democratic means. To participate is to take responsibility for oneself. In 1970 responsibility appeared as a key word in the Association of London Housing Estates’ Tenants Charter which called for participation in these words: ‘Provision should therefore be made for tenants’ representatives to take a responsible part in the management of their estates’ (in Derricourt 1973: 37). Federation secretary, Mike Geater repeated this formula when he called for tenants to be ‘involved responsibly in the decision making which affects their immediate environment’ (forward to Craddock 1975). Responsibility was deliberately invoked by this fledgling tenants’ movement to contrast with the dominant identification of council housing tenants as passive recipients of a ‘one-size fits all’ welfare service. The idea of responsible participation invoked a new identification, one that was intelligible to the changing discourse of the Welfare State. It resonated with councillors who believed the object of participation was to educate tenants in responsibility (Craddock 1975). In exchange for the responsible regulation of
their own behaviour, tenants petitioned to be considered as empowered members of society. The contemporary tenants’ movement is caught in this permanent posture of petition: displaying its responsible behaviour, still waiting for its promised reward.

Their own worst enemy

Participation discourse creates and fosters the identity of the ‘responsible tenant’ (Flint 2004a), a composite entity that is part rational consumer, part active citizen. Government participation policy aims ‘to ensure all social housing tenants have the confidence, skills and power to engage on housing and housing-related neighbourhood issues’ (CLG 2009a: 22). Participation is therefore presented as a process of empowerment in which tenants become rational and enterprising citizen-consumers. This necessarily involves them in regulating their own behaviour, setting an example to their neighbours, and responsibly contributing to the successful organisation of public services (Marinetto 2003, Clarke et al 2007). In making decisions about goods and services and in seeking to wield influence over service providers, the tenant as welfare recipient learns the responsibilities typically associated with property ownership, seen as the hallmark of the empowered citizen. Participation, or the exercise of choice and voice, is seen as a process in which the recipient of public services learns the rules of commodity exchange, and as an education in citizenship, it is viewed as compulsory (Hart, Jones & Bains 1997). Participation becomes a duty imposed on tenants, the refusal to participate is proscribed and the ‘apathetic tenant’ is the disciplining example constructed to act as a moral lesson to tenants. Stephanie criticised this moralised discourse of participation in her TPAS focus group:

You get the government and the [housing company] constantly banging on about you need to get more tenants involved, you haven’t got enough involved […] If others don’t want to get involved, housing companies shouldn’t be spending time and energy panicking and trying to force them to because of the numbers that are expected. And I actually said to somebody (.hh) when you go home on a Monday night you might expect tenants to trot out to their area meetings (..) do you go to a neighbourhood
watch or a residents association meeting to sit and talk about the grass verges? No. What do you do? “Well I kick my feet up, shoes off, watch telly”, but you expect me to go out and do that and it’s, in a way, make (.) make (.) Let them be a good vehicle for tenant participation but don’t patronise us, saying to us, we need to have, we need to do it. Not everyone needs to. It should be there, but I think they put too much pressure on numbers.

Participation exemplifies a moral code of conduct. As a responsible course of action it is associated with hard work and personal endeavour and contrasted with its polar opposite: dependency on welfare. The ‘responsible tenant’ can escape the stigmatised character of social housing by attributing to the identity of the apathetic tenants who do not participate the ‘irresponsible, workshy and undeserving’ tenant stereotype (Card 2006: 54) that haunts housing discourse. A tenants’ movement expressed through the language of participation thus absorbs welfare dependency discourse into its collective action frames; it views mobilisation as a responsibility and attributes its failure to recruit participants to the apathy of its constituency. Here members of a tenants’ association lament the poor attendance at their meetings but attribute it to a decline in personal responsibility among younger tenants:

Deirdre: People in our generation have standards. This is why the property is falling down. Because they get everything paid for, they don’t have to go to work, there’s no pride
Edna: So they’ve no joy in their houses
Deirdre: And a lot of them that live in the, the dwellings (.) They don’t pay rent either
Bob: No
Edna: They don’t pay rent
Deirdre: And they have a right to be there. That’s what they think. You know what I mean it’s the norm for them, they’ve grown up with this era of oh you don’t have to go to work. You get, you get money off ya
Edna: They don’t work and they don’t care about the properties either. Because they’ve no pride
Deirdre: A lot of the young generation expects to be given it for nothing. The families haven’t worked, so they don’t work.

Tenants who fail to participate can be portrayed as rejecting the path to responsible citizenship, having failed to rescue themselves from the mire of welfare dependency. The identity of the apathetic tenant is invented to explain the generational divide that appears in tenants’ organisations where older age groups predominate. ‘They just can’t be bothered’, John says in despair about turnout at his tenants’ association meetings:

You cannot get young tenants involved, no matter what you do. I mean it’s their future: the estates now are their future. But you just cannot get them involved. It’s too much trouble for them. They can’t be bothered. All they want is a roof over their head and they can’t be bothered.

Mourning at another empty tenants’ association meeting, Henry agrees:

It’s very hard with the way people live now. They want to see their soaps, when you say there’s a meeting, they’ve got a meeting round the school and that, its very hard to get the younger people […] Now it’s like, there’s a lot of the older part and they’re dying out in some cases and you’re not getting them replaced, so there’s like the very few doing the bulk of the work now.

‘The biggest problem is apathy,’ Andrew concurs:

When there’s a big issue you can get lots of tenants come out to a meeting, once it’s sorted out, they all go home again. You’re lucky if you can get one person in 500 who’s any interest whatsoever in being on a tenants group. They all want somebody they can use as a mouthpiece but they don’t want to do it themselves.

The apathetic tenant is an identity that has become totemic; it is rooted so inextricably in the movement that it can be conjured immediately by a tangential reference. In this excerpt from a meeting of three tenants’ associations the
identity is activated in response to perceived criticism from the Moderator of the effectiveness of the organisations:

Moderator: What things could a tenants association do to put pressure on the landlord?
Bob: The biggest let down [to me]
Greta: [They never turn up]
Bob: You can’t get enough [people to be involved]
Greta: [You can’t get them]
Bob: It don’t matter what you do
Sarah: No, no

To an outside observer Bob’s response was unforeseen in that it did not appear to answer the Moderator’s question. Greta, however, anticipated the conclusion of his statement, and interrupted him, correctly assuming that Bob intended to mobilise the identity of the apathetic tenant to avoid any deliberation of the effectiveness of the organisation. Apathy has become the automatic excuse for a failure of mobilisation and recruitment strategies as Julia confirms from her federation:

General apathy is something that you’re fighting all the time. I mean when we go campaigning we get a lot of people and they say “won’t get you anywhere”, don’t they? You know, or “we’re not signing this” or “we don’t agree with you because no matter what you do, they won’t do anything about it.”

An instrumental approach to participation by many tenants otherwise labelled apathetic was noted by Kim McKee (2009b) whose research observed that tenants would pick and choose the issues in which they got involved and balance the time commitment, and their personal interest, against the likelihood of achievement. Research commissioned by the Tenant Services Authority (Ipsos MORI 2009a) showed that the majority of tenants supported the idea of involvement in housing services but that their perceptions of power and efficacy deterred them from taking part. Concerned that their landlord would not concede
power to them, or feeling disempowered in general, half of all tenants surveyed said they had no interest in participation (Ipsos MORI 2009b); they nevertheless felt under pressure to take part and, when questioned by the researchers, resorted to justifications to explain their reluctance to get involved. A lack of confidence in their abilities to bring about change, combined with a keen awareness of the refusal of housing providers to yield control, provide strong reasons for tenants to withhold their support from tenants’ organisations. The association of apathy with welfare dependence and the fixation of participation as responsible behaviour are common themes in discussions at tenants’ group meetings, as this study shows, and many younger tenants, especially young parents, decide not to join these organisations correctly foreseeing the prickly reception they would receive (Ipsos Mori 2009a).

In deploying the welfare discourse of apathy to explain the failure of their mobilisation strategies, tenants evidence a deeper unease about the efficacy of their actions. The totemic identity of the apathetic tenant conceals the layers of self-doubt and submission that are embodied in even the most responsible of tenant participant. In this TPAS conference focus group, Clare and Yvonne provide the tenants’ movement with a strong contentious outline. Tenants are envisaged in opposition to landlords, as a body with separate interests that needs to be strong and to challenge, to stand up for itself. This language is markedly different from the vague idealistic statements of shared interest and common ground that characterise much tenant identity talk around mobilisation and recruitment. Yet the members of the discussion group have no expectation that the contentious movement they outline will effect change; indeed, they have already admitted the impossibility of mobilising support:

Clare: I think tenants are their own worst enemy because they put up with it. They don’t challenge enough.

Moderator: Is that because it’s what they’re used to?

Clare: Yes

Linda: Sometimes it’s just because it’s too much trouble. You know there are tenants that just think it’s easier to let the, let the

Yvonne: Yes, let someone else do it
Wendy: What um, the problem is, they have tried for years to solve problems and problems have been denied, that means access to their complaint has been denied. The result is that, um, they've given up and for me as their representative that makes them unreachable, because they just say “Oh no, I’m not talking about it. I can't be bothered”

Clare: “Nothing changes”, yeah

Wendy: “Nothing changes, I don’t care what you say, they won’t do anything so just go away and leave me alone”

Yvonne: That’s playing into the landlord’s hands

Clare: Yeah it is, instead of a group of you really strengthening up so you can challenge it

In this focus group, a frame of efficacy, of belief in change, appears to be shared by the speakers but they feel let down by their fellow tenants who are ‘playing into the landlord’s hands’. Although they articulate a combative frame of resistance, the speakers have no faith that they can express a convincing frame of mobilisation. They know they cannot take effective collective action because submission and hopelessness have been written into the identity of the social housing tenant.

**Not everybody is capable of that**

In Judith Butler’s re-working of the Althusserian concept, interpellation is not understood as an external power exerted on a subject but as a psychic force that constitutes the subject’s identity. Butler (1997a) emphasises that the process of subject formation does not merely internalise traits of subjection. Drawing on the work of Simone de Beauvoir and Pierre Bourdieu, and on their source in the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, Butler cites the embodiment of subjection through interpellation; stressing that the subject is constructed with a relationship to power ‘as a fixed and preordained essence’ (Beauvoir 1960: 39).

Interpellation appears to instil feelings of vulnerability and lack of self-worth in tenants that are reflected in the opinions expressed above about the abilities of
tenants to mobilise and bring about change. The psychic effect of power on the subjugated is well recorded in post-colonial literature. Paulo Freire (1993: 18) for instance, chronicled the limitations of consciousness displayed by colonial subjects, describing what he called a state of ‘naïve transitivity’ characterised by a type of reasoning founded on nostalgia, emotion and fancy, an oversimplification of problems and an avoidance of methods of investigation. Simon Charlesworth has described this disposition among the poorest of the English working class. ‘These are people who have been levelled,’ he argued, commenting on a ‘profound sense of vulnerability and insecurity’ (Charlesworth 2000: 54). For Charlesworth the unrelenting grind of poverty, a life of ‘getting by’, measured out in welfare benefits or in the low pay of insecure and unrewarding work, has a shaping effect that instils an inability to plan for a future, or to think of changing anything. The majority of social housing tenants depend for their income on means-tested benefits or retirement pensions; their lack of status is matched by the absence of economic power. ‘Their energies are often eaten up with the daily struggle of making ends meet,’ Rose Gilroy (1998: 35, 36) said. They are constantly assailed by messages reporting their own failure.

At a TPAS conference in 2008, a group of tenants are discussing the opportunities for tenants in participation. One participant, Ted, promotes the idea that tenants should take the initiative and he advocates tenant control. He suggests that tenant management organisations, or community-led housing associations offer tenants the opportunity to direct housing staff rather than being dependent on them for involvement in decision-making. The positional analysis of the focus group discussion that follows provides a vivid illustration of the difficulties tenants face in strategic planning. Positioning analysis draws attention to the attributions of permissions in dialogue and is adept at identifying the conversational devices that obstruct individuals from taking or advancing positions that would give them rights to lead others into a set of beliefs (Harré & Langenhove 1999). In the following lengthy extract, positioning is used to analyse in detail a rare moment of deliberation of strategy among tenants in order to pin point the processes through which limitations are imposed on the possibilities of their actions, and through which the power relations that ensure their submission are recreated and sustained. As Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger (2003) argued, power and oppression are accomplishments and they are accomplished in talk. This example is worthy of study because it captures a
moment in which collective identities are claimed and denied, and in which
dominant social structures and roles are reasserted at the cost of movement
mobilisation. Because of its length, this discussion is transcribed in numbered
idea units in order to aid analysis, according to the format established by James
Gee (Riessman 1993). In the first extract Karen argues against the direction of
tenant control set out by Ted, and it becomes clear that her objection is based
on an assessment of the capabilities of tenants.

2. The service provider
3. Is doing the business side
4. Let them do all the finance for us.
5. Switch the tables round.
6. We’re, we’re doing the work for them now
7. Let them do it for us.
8. Karen: (.Hhh) Yes [in]
10. You can’t keep supporting them.
11. [0.1]
12. Karen: Yeah I agree with that but then a lot depends
13. on the calibre of the tenants and
14. [what they’re capable of]
15. Ted: [Course it does]
16. Karen: [I mean]
17. Ted: [Course it does]
18. And this is where these, these
19. Conventions, if you like,
20. Karen: Mm
21. Ted: Strengthen us
22. Karen: Mm
23. Joy: Yeah
24. Karen: I [mean]
25. Ted: [In our]
26. In our approach to it, you, you [learn new things]
27. Karen: [Oh yeah]
28. You get a strong panel
29. Or a strong board and you’re fine::
30. You get one that’s fairly clueless and leaderless
32. And: they would just sink
32. Ted: [Well]
33. Karen: [I mean]
34. Ted: Then you try and replace them
35. Karen: Mm, yeah, yeah
36. Ted: You must have a strong team around you
37. Karen: Oh yeah I agree [entirely]
38. Ted: [And that team] will communicate
39. With the rest of the community
40. Stephanie: If you can get that team.
41. Ted: Well:: that’s the challenge.

In lines 1 – 7, Ted expounds a strategy of tenant control, and in lines 17-21 refers to the TPAS conference as a tactical opportunity for a movement to develop its leadership abilities. The strength of Karen’s opposition to this view is shown by the number of attempts she makes to break in (lines 8, 16, 24, 33, 35, 37), and her statements at lines 12 – 14 and 27 – 32 reveal her doubts about the innate ability of tenants to fulfil this strategy. Stephanie’s intervention in the debate at line 40 diverts a burgeoning dispute about the essential nature of tenants into a tactical question of mobilisation. However, as Ted continues to expound a strategy of tenant leadership, Karen’s misgivings about the ability of
tenants to exercise this role become more explicit. When Elizabeth adopts Ted’s argument and expresses it in more antagonistic terms, Karen tries anxiously to interrupt.

42. Ted: It’s just, you’re looking at the housing

43. Associations, councils and whatever,

44. We’re still doing it for them.

45. Karen: But looking at it the other way

46. Ted: Why shouldn’t we say to them (.) do your job

47. Elizabeth: We might be doing it for them

48. Karen: [I hate to get political]

49. Elizabeth: [But we’re not getting paid] like they are

50. Ted: Exactly

51. Karen: ((Clears throat!))

52. Ted: And this is [why]

53. Elizabeth: [And they’re] getting the high wages

54. And we’re getting the low [pension]

55. Ted: [This has got to change] hasn’t it?

56. Because it’s us that’s paying them.

57. Karen: Umm

58. Ted: [0.1] Its got to change

59. Karen: Yeah but,

60. The Lord helps those that help themselves.

61. Paul: ((Laughs))

62. Joy: Hey

63. Ted: Yeah you know, that, that’s the sort of attitude,

64. You know unfortunately

65. We’ve got to get away from.

66. Be more positive and go for it.
Karen’s unease at the position taken by Ted, and especially the support he receives from Elizabeth, leads her to interrupt five times, twice displaying abrupt sounds of disagreement (lines 51 and 57). Ted’s rebuke of Karen at line 63 for her pessimistic approach indicates the high feelings that this debate is generating. Stephanie once again defuses the looming confrontation between Ted and Karen at line 75, but this intervention leads Karen to reveal in line 79 her low opinion of tenants’ abilities in a more emphatic manner than she would, perhaps, have liked. Ted counters this view by arguing that tenants can learn to exercise management skills by undertaking training. Karen doubts that this presents any solution:

Karen: We’ve done the training but

You can’t always find the people that are Prepared to do that

I mean [for us to be]

[So you’d have the housing]
Karen continues to argue alone against the notion that tenants have the abilities to run their own housing organisations, while Stephanie appears to be taking some time to understand the idea Ted is promoting. As soon as Stephanie clarifies Ted's argument in lines 84-91, Paul intervenes in support of Karen and Stephanie and the conversation turns to an undisguised criticism of the failings of tenants.

93. Paul: I think if we can go on that line
94. It's going to take years
95. Unless the tenants change their attitude
96. Some of the tenants, really,
97. They've a don't care attitude
98. Stephanie: Uh huh
100. Paul: You see they just come in
101. Live there,
102. They don't care what is happening.
103. They do not participate,
104. Don't do, put any effort.
105. So I think the tenants themselves
106. Need to change their attitude as well.
To start to care about the place they live in.

The spectre of the apathetic tenant enters the conversation in line 96, an identity so iconic its mere mention provides a conclusive argument against the potential of a tenants’ movement to bring about change in power relations.

Karen: I hate to say it and this is going to sound really, Really bad considering Everything that's been said (.hh) But there’s also this: Know your limitations (0.2)

Stephanie: Hmm

Karen: I mean that sounds ever so bad And I don’t actually mean it to And I’ve actually probably said it wrong

Ted: No

Paul: Go on

Ted: Carry on

Karen: It is knowing your limitations You’ve got to be realistic Course you have In your goals.

Karen: I mean, like I say, in a utopian society We’d all have what we want But it doesn’t work that way and so, I mean it's, its gradual battles, isn’t it

Paul: Yeah.
Paul, Stephanie and Karen have colluded in setting a limit to tenants’ expectations. They have referenced an identification of tenants as essentially apathetic in order to counter Ted’s motivational argument that tenants should not settle for what they are given and should take the strategic initiative in participation. Dismissing this strategy as utopian in line 124, they have reaffirmed the abject place of tenants in the bounded horizon embodied by the dominant discourse. An identity of tenants as capable leaders was presented by Ted in order to enthuse and motivate, and it was greeted by a response founded in self-doubt and self-loathing. In the conclusion of the debate, Ted was denied the right to position tenants as playing any leadership role in participation and the prohibitions imposed on him were naturalised as part of the identity of being a tenant. It appears that there are discursive conditions for the articulation of a tenants’ movement. The inability of tenants to mobilise an effective movement must be accepted before any further progress can be made. In order to aspire to liberation tenants must first admit to subordination.

**To be part of the system**

‘A kind of immediate submission to order’ (Bourdieu 1990: 54) appears as the motif among tenants in the focus group studied in the previous section. This immediate submission, expressed in hopelessness or lack of confidence, displaced onto the ‘apathy’ of others, is something that tenants carry with them inscribed in every thought, word and deed. The low status and stigma experienced by social housing tenants coupled with their lack of economic power has a psychic impact that can be understood as an embodied process; it is experienced in the body. This sense of embodied oppression is captured for the English working class by Mike Savage (2000: 107) who writes of class as ‘encoded in people’s sense of self-worth and in their attitudes to and awareness of others – in how they carry themselves as individuals’. Savage is working with Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of habitus, ‘understood as a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and action’ (Bourdieu 1977: 82). Submission should therefore be understood as embodied in social housing tenants as ‘a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of feeling and thinking’ (Bourdieu 1977: 93) that is perpetuated in
every generation, beyond conscious thought, appearing intrinsic, natural, and unchangeable.

In a discussion at a TPAS conference in 2009 two participants, Fran and Muriel attempt to construct a motivational frame to inspire contentious collective action. This is contested rigorously by Marcia who maintains that tenants are not capable of challenge.

Fran: I believe we all have the power to get things changed,
We just need to be j-joined as one voice to get things changed.
Marcia: But not everybody has got the confidence to do that and
That has to be recognised.
Muriel: But you have to learn. [You have]
Marcia: [But not] everybody can learn that
Muriel: No [but]
Marcia: [Its not] within them to be able to speak out
Muriel: Not [necessarily]
Marcia: [Doesn’t mean] to say that they will be able to do so

Marcia’s determination to block a discussion around collective action is shown by her disregard for the normal turn-taking mode of conversation; she interrupts Muriel three times in order to prevent further consideration of Fran’s initial statement. At a regional tenants federation a similar exchange takes place:

Richard: The tenants are used to the landlords telling them what they expect, not the other way around which it should be. Tenants should be telling them what they expect.
Andrew: Yeah, but for a tenant to be able to do that, he needs a basic level of understanding of what is and isn’t possible.

The assertion here that tenants generally lack a basic level of understanding is symptomatic of the disabling disposition that launches a social movement but ensures its domesticity. Blamed in political discourse for their adherence to a
tenure perceived as a welfare benefit, social housing tenants carry a sense of shame that strengthens the bonds of conformity enforced by poverty (Piven & Cloward 1977). The powerless become highly dependent; they are ‘socialised into compliance’ (Gaventa 1980: 18). Post-colonial theorists contend that this in-built compliance manifests itself as a sense of dependency on authority; a blend of envy, admiration, resentment and jealousy that binds subjects to their servitude. Paulo Freire (1990: 22) wrote: ‘The oppressed, at a certain moment of their existential experience, adopt an attitude of adherence to the oppressor. Under these circumstances they cannot consider him sufficiently clearly to objectify him – to discover him outside themselves.’ The oppressed feel themselves to be lesser; they seek to annihilate their own presence and to take on the body image of the oppressor instead. Frantz Fanon amplified this in Black Skin, White Masks (1986: 154) where he wrote: ‘The black man stops behaving as an actional person. The goal of his behaviour will be the Other (in the guise of the white man), for the Other alone can give him worth.’

This orientation towards authority was the subject of discussion at a meeting of a regional tenants’ federation where the phrase ‘Yes Tenants’ was used frequently. It was explained that ‘Yes Tenants’ referred to members of the national tenants’ organisation, Taroe. Andrew spoke scornfully of the Secretary of Taroe who had embraced the government Housing Minister at a recent public meeting.

Andrew: Yeah, well we’ve all made the, (0.2) the point about, er, leading tenant activists cuddling Housing Ministers on the stage in public meetings, uhhh.

Teresa: Yeah

Richard: That’s right

Andrew: That comfortable with, I won’t say the enemy, but the opposition at times is (hhh.) not good (0.1)

Teresa: No, to me a shake of the hand, you know, “yes thank you” and all that

Yet being recognised by authority figures is why tenants participate and there can be few stronger symbols of earned recognition than an embrace from the
Housing Minister. Respect received from the powerful is one of the few tangible benefits of participation. This desire to be close to the powerful, to ingratiate, to be accepted is the effect of a devastating lack of self-worth. It means that collective action in the tenant’s movement rarely ventures into outright conflict or open disagreement, since the goal is not to alienate power holders but to gain their acceptance (Lipsky 1968). In the following additional extract from the 2008 TPAS focus group studied earlier in this chapter, Joy uses the language of struggle to make a claim for the universal rights of tenants. When the moderator draws attention to the words used in the claim, the response from the other participants is significant.

Joy: You have to keep on and on fighting for the rights of you and the people around you.

Moderator: Is that how you see it, fighting for=

Joy: Yep

Moderator: =Rights?

Paul: Mmm

Karen: Not necessarily

Stephanie: No, I don’t see it

Ted: No, not so much a fight

Karen: No we don’t have to

Ted: Perhaps a matter of, ahh, I find it from our area a matter of discussion to come to the right [compromise]

Stephanie: [Compromise]

Bruce: Yeah compromise

Karen: Yeah that’s the word I was looking for

The language of conflict has no place in these tenants’ vocabulary. They want to be accepted. When asked what the strategy of a tenant’s movement should be, another TPAS focus group gave the answer:

To be consulted and not directed. To be considered at all time to be part of the system automatically
This desire to be embraced by those with power and prestige is mirrored inside tenant’s organisations where the embrace of power can have corrosive effect. Lesley Andrews (1979) charted the in-fighting, political intrigue and rivalry that can develop in the organisational behaviour of some local tenants associations. In an attempt to reverse the relations of subjection tenants make themselves into a semblance of the authorities they blame for their subjection. Najinder describes the process that takes place in neighbourhood tenants groups:

Sometimes you get a dominant leader who just wants to grab everything to him herself and leave the rest to be bystanders.

In the following focus group discussion, the complex relationship to authority among those accustomed to subjection is acknowledged.

Claire: Power is an awful word really because some people it’s straight away ‘up you’.

Yvonne: Yeah. Frightens them.

Claire: And it makes, it’s “I’m the chair of this, and I’m the chair of that”. You know what I mean?

Wendy: They don’t know how to use it. They see power as a different thing, don’t they? Power to me is the ability to change and influence whereas for some residents power is telling people what to do.

If a little authority has corrosive effects within the committees of tenants associations, it can be devastating when reflected at a wider level where it is manifest in a history of feuding and factionalism among national tenants’ organisations. The National Tenants’ Organisation in 1977 was contested by the development in 1989 of the National Tenants and Residents Federation (Hood & Woods 1994). The merger of these two organisations in 1998 into the Tenants & Residents Organisations of England (Taroe) was contested immediately by the formation of the Housing Association Residents and Tenants Organisation of England (HARTOE), which, until that organisation’s demise, confined Taroe’s movement building to the local authority sector. The legitimacy of Taroe was challenged again in 2002 by the launch of the Tenants’ Union which attained sufficient government recognition to be included on the national
Tenants Sounding Board set up by government in 2003 (Millward 2005b, Mayo & Tickell 2006). Today three national organisations, Taroe, the National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations, and the Confederation of Co-operative Housing are recognised by government as speaking for tenants, and in 2010 were joined by a fourth in the short-lived National Tenants Voice, while the consultancy TPAS, with its large tenant membership, has most communication with tenants organisations. In addition the regional tenants’ organisations, established to liaise with New Labour’s structure of regional government, have argued against the national role played by Taroe.

Tony, a leading director of Taroe explains:

The regions are threatening, because the regions believe together that they should represent the nation, and I don’t see that as the function of the regions. The regions are there to support the regional organisations within them, not the other way round. They have their glass ceiling which is the region. Our glass ceiling is England.

Accepting that the national organisation does not enjoy wide recognition from tenants, Tony blames it on rivalry between key individuals and their competitive empire building.

The negativity from the tenant movement is a problem and there are people out there that, that, it’s far easy to destroy than to create something, and there’s a lot of people out there who are destroyers […] A lot of the people I see are in it for themselves. Er, and that’s quite sad. Um, it’s more about them than it is the organisation, and it’s more about them than it is tenants generally.

The antagonism that surfaces within tenants’ organisations appears to resonate with Homi Bhabha’s (1994: 63-64) postcolonial analysis: ‘The very place of identification, caught in the tension of demand and desire, is a space of splitting. The fantasy of the native is precisely to occupy the master’s place while keeping his place in the slave’s avenging anger’. The illusory lure of power and position in the divided leadership of the tenants’ movement appears to offer the ‘master’s place’ to those suffering the inevitability of embodied helplessness, ensuring
endemic feuding and rivalry. But the ‘anger’ of the movement is unquenched and the tenants’ movement presents itself as a split subject: one inclined to submission by physical disposition, yet uneasily aware that submission is not inevitable (Bourdieu 1990: 54).

Social housing tenants carry submission as a ‘bodily hexis’ (Bourdieu 1977: 93), and this subjection is renewed and continually incorporated by their performance in the power relations of participation. Bourdieu (1977: 79), however, maintains that habitus is the basis for an ‘intentionless invention of regulated improvisation’; it is the accumulated effect of playing the game, a game that is internalised and perpetuated unthinkingly, but one that still requires playing. Expanding on this performative theorisation, Judith Butler maintains that ‘submission to an order is, paradoxically, the effect of becoming savvy in its ways’ (Butler 1999: 118). The habitus is formed, but it is also formative, she argues, and the reproduction of subjection is central to the contestation and reformulation of the subject (Butler 1997b). Each occasion in which tenants are brought face to face with their own submission is also a moment in which they are reminded of the possibility of recognition. In acquiescing to the rules of participation, and in putting them into practice on a daily basis, tenants become savvy in the ways of a discourse in which recognition and subjection are twinned. Subjection constantly accompanies tenants because it is the language they use to express themselves as a contentious movement.

This seeming paradox can perhaps be better understood through Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward’s (1977) notion of ‘poor people’s movements’. The concept describes contentious mobilisation among the most vulnerable and marginalised and those with least resources. Applied in the English context it captures the embodied submission, the accompanying sense of low status and lack of self-worth that dogs a tenants’ movement, and that undermines the feelings of efficacy needed to mobilise sustained collective action. For Piven and Cloward this submission did not preclude the organisation of protest among ‘the poor’, nor did it rule out the potential for transformational changes in their consciousness and behaviour. What it meant was that the opportunities for defiance were structured by the conditions that distinguished poor people’s movements so that ‘mass defiance is neither freely available nor the forms it takes freely determined’ (Piven & Cloward 1977: 23). Collective action among social housing tenants is similarly constrained. It appears most likely to develop
as a response to institutional opportunities, to display deference to authority, and seek patronage and support rather than overtly challenge power relations. Its attempts at mobilisation will encounter a crippling lack of efficacy, and will stimulate rivalries and feuding where it is necessary to construct shared identity positions and common interests among a disparate social base. These are the rules of the game; they provide the context and conditions for social housing tenants, but they also provide the vocabulary of motives that makes collective action possible.

**Built into talk**

This chapter has assessed the mobilising potential of the framing activities of tenants. While collective action frames aim to motivate a tenants’ movement, dominant identifications sedimented through generations of power and oppression are reproduced in these frames and undermine their effectiveness. The hegemonic ubiquity of the identities of ‘the responsible tenant’ and ‘the apathetic tenant’ effectively militate against the mobilisation of contentious action. Identities steeped in stigma, disadvantage, and deprivation are ‘built into talk’ (Wilkinson & Kitzinger 2003: 171) and are continually reproduced by tenants who proceed to undermine their own aims.

Frames that encourage identification with a cause, identify antagonists, and provide the guiding principles of collective action are constructed from definitions established in competing and more legitimate frames. Emergent frames need to establish sufficient resonance to overcome the debilitating effects of these authorised identities (Snow & Benford 1988), and ‘the closer the frames come to giving solutions to the defined problems and ways to reach these solutions, the higher the mobilisation capacity’ (Gerhards & Rucht 1992: 582). The weakness of the ‘Community Ownership’ frame is that it is based on a narrative of lost community, a dominant discourse that records the failure of mobilisation. The frame’s contention that social housing is a public good is founded on belief in a loss of mutuality and co-operation. It is therefore consistent with the identities constructed in this frame that tenants who advocate collective action for ‘the rights’ of tenants, or ‘to challenge’ landlords should also assume the
impossibility of mobilising support for their cause. The frame of ‘Challenging Power and Knowledge’ advances the experiential knowledge of tenants as superior to that of housing professionals but it presents movement participants with a limited choice of action: either to undertake the enormous personal commitment involved in exercising tenant control or to continue their everyday participative efforts to influence their landlords. All its potential outcomes are contained within the boundaries of public participation policy; the frame generates antagonism and justifies conflict with housing staff but these prognostic effects are off-set by the subservience to power-holders that has been embodied over generations of social housing tenants. Feelings of inadequacy and embodied submission are forced to the surface by a frame that endorses the mammoth task of self-management. Finally, the ‘Real Democracy’ frame draws on a republican tradition pillaged in public policy discourses to justify the withdrawal of State services and promote the governmental strategy of active citizenship and identifications of the consumer (Marinetto 2003). It provides an organisational blueprint for collective action and sets out specific values for the movement but its shared source in democratic theory may encourage tenants to engage in ‘contest for the consumer voice’ rather than adopt oppositional strategies (Daunton & Hilton 2001: 30).

The construction of a tenants’ movement is hampered at every step by its own submission to power. Its mobilisation strategies lack definition; its organisations are splintered and competitive. But the movement identity that is generated from this submission stubbornly preserves excluded discourses, shelters the development of critical thought, and enables deliberation on injustice. It is, as William Gamson (1992a) argued, an achievement in itself which may require us to rethink our concept of success in collective action. The resonance of tenant framing activity appears not in its ability to mobilise contentious action but in the construction of what Viktor Gecas (2000: 94) called ‘value-based identities’. These frames are packages of emotionally-charged values that manifest themselves in anger at injustice and in passionate assertions of equality. They are responses generated by the practiced accomplishment of subjection, and as value-based identities they become as embodied in tenants as the submission that undercuts them.

The practice of subjection is therefore the process of becoming savvy in resistance, and what is built into talk is an agonistic identity that has the potential
to become the component of a social movement. The next chapter examines the extent to which tenants’ collective action can be thought of as a social movement with aims, objectives and action plans; to what extent the identity work that has been observed in action can be said to constitute a collective identity.
Chapter 9
Goals, Tactics and Strategies

Michael Lipsky (1968: 1144) observed: ‘extremely powerless groups, lacking cohesion, will not even appear for observation’. Something less than a tenants’ movement has appeared for observation in the previous analysis; what appears is resonant of Freire’s ‘naïve transitivity’: a ‘poor people’s movement’, constructed out of emotion and naivety. It is vulnerable, dependent, and disabled by the effects of power. What has been observed is the construction of movement identities, not of a movement.

The theory of collective identity operates as the symbolic yardstick of social movement processes. It sets out the three dimensions that are, supposedly, essential for the formation of a unified collective actor. While emotional commitment and the recognition of shared values form part of the definition, the content of a collective identity consists of an action system based on agreement on goals, means, or tactics, and strategies for action (Melucci 1989, Mueller 1994). This identity is not a static framework or a written constitution, it is the effect of a network of relationships and negotiations between individuals, but the outcome is unity: the formation of a collective that can be defined as a social movement. It is manifested in the perceptions of participants, their framing activity and discourse (Melucci 1995, Gamson 1992b), but together they must develop a shared assessment of the possibilities and limits of collective action (Klandermans 1992). Embracing collective identity theory as a robust framework for assessing progress towards the achievement of a social movement, this chapter sets out to investigate considerations of ‘the goals, means and environment of action’ in tenant identity work (Melucci 1989: 35). It explores the organisational behaviour, the patronage, resources and political opportunities that constitute the contemporary tenants’ movement.

Singing from the same hymn sheet

The social movement organisation (SMO) dominates theory and analysis in the study of protest movements (Miethe 2009), and even the evangelist of
neighbourhood mobilisation, Saul Alinsky (1969) affirmed the inexorable dogma that a movement needs national organisation. In this TPAS focus group in 2008, a discussion about tenant organisation leads to the following exchange:

Moderator: Do you feel you belong to a tenants’ movement?
Graham: If you want to call us a movement we’ve got to have a national strategy.
Moderator: Do you have a national strategy?
Mary: We have a national wish to have a national strategy.
Winston: It would make the landlords sit up if all the tenants and all the panels were all singing from the same hymn sheet.

The idea that they might belong to a movement appears new to these participants, and the proposal that tenants might agree a joint strategy is received as a novel suggestion that is worthy of consideration. Later, Sonia follows up this point:

We need a manifesto, a link between all the many organisations. A statement of intent

While Sonia refers to ‘all the organisations’, Winston’s definition of a tenants’ movement should be noted; he says ‘all the tenants and all the panels’. He does not say ‘all the tenant organisations’. The reference to panels is to customer panels: the sounding boards, focus groups, and service review groups that are initiated by landlords to enable tenant participation. The movement, for Winston, is not a network of autonomous tenants’ organisations but a loose assemblage of individuals who are recruited by their landlords.

The reduction in the number of autonomous tenants’ organisations has limited the opportunities to envisage a movement with a distinct strategy. The amorphous nature of the contemporary movement is reflected in a lack of coherence or collective agreement over goals. The stated aims of the national tenants’ organisation, Taroe are to improve the quality, affordability and accessibility of social housing but it also, and more generally, aims ‘to improve and protect the quality of life, social and environmental conditions for everyone in our local communities’ (Taroe 2008). A desktop survey of the publicity of twelve tenants’ federations across the country finds that the majority define
themselves as ‘umbrella’ bodies, whose aim is to support local tenants’ associations, and that act as community development agencies. One federation describes itself as ‘a catalyst for community action’ (Barnsley Federation of Tenants & Residents 2008: 7); another is ‘community focused’ (Plymouth Federation of Tenants & Residents 2009: 2). While most federations are involved in participation with a regulated social housing provider and set out ambitions for improvements to their housing service, only two out of those surveyed related their aims to questions of housing policy or tenants’ interests. ‘Campaigning for better housing conditions, tenants’ rights and tenants’ involvement in decision-making’ is how Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations (2008) defines itself, while Leeds Tenants Federation (2010) addresses itself to issues of housing supply and affordability. The picture of the movement that emerges from this review is not a challenging one; most tenants’ federations engage in community work and even the national organisation defines itself in relation to a wholesome concept of local communities that complements the empowerment aims of governmental strategies (for example CLG 2006, 2007c, 2008).

In keeping with the localism of the movement, most tenants regard the role of a national organisation as one of passing on ideas and good practice that can be put into action in the local area. A national movement is envisaged as a network of local organisations all sharing their experience but not offering a co-ordinated response, as Jan’s comment makes clear

With it being national we can get other tenants’ ideas from other groups, er, with your own, and see if they’re doing something better than you can, copy them sort of thing, and if you’re doing something better than them, you can pass it on to each other.

Local connection is so essential to the identity of the tenants’ movement that even this idea of national networking is contested. In the following discussion, Jean has just returned from a national tenants’ conference and is keen to promote the benefits of the National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations, one of the three government-recognised tenant organisations, to her tenant management organisation. However, her fellow board member Gary challenges the relevance of a national movement to their local estate:
Jean: I think there should definitely be a tenants’ movement. They are really interested and you meet people of other tenant management groups, and they tell you things they’re doing and that gives you ideas what you can be doing. So I do think national tenants is a very good thing (h) because everyone’s telling one another their little tips. It’s like you read in newspaper, um, somebody’ll tell you tip how to get lipstick out of your (0.1) thing or some chewing gum off things, it’s word of mouth and little tips like that I think help you

Christine: Yeah

Jean: With what you are doing, and I think that is important. And you only get that by meeting other people (0.1) not by just sitting back and doing nothing. You get it by meeting people and hearing what they’re doing and things like that. Yeah I’m a big believer in national tenants’ movement.

Gary: But should we mirror other tenants associations? You know, should we work same way as them, or should we try and find better ways of working. You know what I mean? If they come out with ideas should we take their ideas, use their ideas

Jean: Well they come along and use your’s as well, it’s a movement that’s a mixture.

Gary: I, I

Jean: You learn and they learn.

Gary: I don’t believe in, er, mirroring other associations, I think we should, to build us own way, and make us name in it, we should find us own ways.

For Gary, the particularist aims of his locality justify a strategy of localism to the exclusion of all networking or wider mobilisation. Although Jean advances support for the idea of a national movement, she is careful to stress that her aims remain local and particular. The role of the national movement is to pass on tips that may be useful to the locality and that can be adapted to local needs. What is remarkable about this discussion as it continues is the imagery Jean uses to convey and promote the role she attributes to national organisation:
Jean: Yeah but, what I’m saying, finding your own way actually, what I’m saying it’s, it’s like I’ve just been saying about lipstick and tips, so, you don’t, your wife don’t want to know how to get lipstick out of her top, she needs to find it out herself, but no, she would be grateful for that little tip.

Christine: Yeah I would.

Jean: Wouldn’t yah? So this is what I’m saying. Tips from other peop- you don’t have to do what they do. Just like you pass your tips what you found onto other people, you’re not mirroring them, because although you’ve got that tip, you might find a better way round it.

Christine: Yeah, yeah.

Jean: To move it on, you know, but all these little things that you listen and you hear, all click in there, and you think oh yeah, that’s a good idea, but maybe if we move this there, or we put that into place with. It all gives you a better going on, of what things are, don’t it?

[..]

Eileen: I think we should be united. I think if we are national we’ve more power where government is and local authorities, put our viewpoint and to say how we want our communities run. And I think it gives us a stronger voice, but equally so, I think little pockets can work miracles as well.

Gary: Yeah.

Christine: Hmm.

The domesticity of Jean’s analogy of removing lipstick from clothes, and her appeal to Christine, Gary’s wife, to support her in this gendered knowledge, recalls a debate among radical community workers in the late 1970s and 1980s about the mobilisation potential of the tenants’ movement they were determined to effect. Peter Baldock (1982) attributed the ability of the tenants’ movement to establish new organisational models based on participatory and direct democracy to the leadership role of women. The symbolic importance of mutual aid and co-operation in the framing activity of tenants was a result of ‘new modes of organisation based on local housewives’ networks, modes that were more informal, put more emphasis on mutual support, were more openly democratic than the models imposed by men’ (Baldock 1982: 124). The domesticity of the movement proved its strength in generating distinctive values,
but, as John Cowley (1979: 133) noted, ‘places of residence fragment people, each behind their own front door’. In his account of the tenants’ rent protests in Sheffield from 1967-1968, Baldock envisages the tenants’ movement developing from a ‘revolt of women, the managers of working class consumption, against an attack on their ability to do that job of managing consumption’ (1982: 124). Tenants’ action begins in the kitchen, for Baldock, and spreads to the street, but it remains an issue of household management and is therefore constitutionally unable to become a national movement. Steve Bolger and the co-authors of *Towards Socialist Welfare Work* (1981: 143) support this view:

> ‘If locality based community groups have a strength it stems from the immediate, material relationship the constituents have to the issue; a direct material relationship that can, if developed, contradict a subordinate and social democratic consciousness. However, a direct material relationship cannot of, and by itself, construct a political understanding which expands beyond the issue in question to a wider political perspective.’

In the group discussion above, Jean used the immediate and material analogy of household management to convey the benefits of national mobilisation but related those benefits only to the issue in question, her local group. Eileen intervened at the end of this debate to express the role of a national tenants’ movement in explicitly political language, setting out its relationship to government policy, and its strategic role in articulating common issues across communities, specifically issues of democracy, ‘how we want our communities run’. Her concession to the role of ‘little pockets’ indicates her recognition that movement building among tenants is a fragile process that must celebrate the local and the particular even as it attempts to construct the semblance of shared interests and motivate collective action. These two poles exert opposite attractions in tenant identity talk as the following excerpts from a discussion at a tenants’ federation illustrate. The members are attempting to accommodate the distinctiveness of locality-based organisations with the development of an effective national movement:

> Jan: It can’t be a proper tenant’s movement if nobody, all work together, everybody’s got to work together, all sing from the same hymn sheet
Terri: Yep

Julia: [Oh yeah]

Jan: [Otherwise] it won’t work. I mean what tenants want in one part of the country; probably they won’t want in another part

Julia: All the needs are different aren’t they?

Jan: The needs are different

Mina: Yeah

Jan: But unless everybody’s working together (0.1) %it won't work%

Julia: [But these]

Ron: [It's to get a consensus] isn’t it?

Eileen: Yeah

Ron: Which would be the biggest bugbear, isn’t it. Because [Locality] X is different from [Locality] Y etc and if you’re talking, what 47 odd local authorities?

Dave: Yeah

Ron: And how many counties have we got?

Julia: And there’s more deprivation in some councils [than others]

Ron:                              [Than what there is in others.] So everybody's got a different point of view. So getting all them together is going to be one hell of a job.

This tenants' federation is active in the Defend Council Housing campaign and in Taroe. It is therefore better placed than many to balance the competing drivers of tenant action. But this is by no means an easy process and the construction of agreement on this issue is fraught with pitfalls. As the discussion around national organisation continues, voices are raised as one member articulates strong support for localism that threatens to be divisive:

   Terri: As tenants we would support what London needs, just as London would support us on what our needs are.

   Mina: Mmm

   Terri: And that’s (0.2)
Mina: Mmm
Terri: the basis of everybody working together:
Mina: Mmm

Terri: Realising there is different needs, but supporting the tenants when the needs are still different.

Dave: I think you have a better chance of doing this in smaller communities than going national, myself.
Terri: (.hh)

Harry: Well

Julia: [We need to know what we’re doing national]
Terri: [The bigger the voice]

(0.3)

Dave: The bigger the voice, what?

Harry: You can’t have a national [voice that].

Ron: [You could] become isolated then

Dave: Pardon?

Ron: Smaller communities could become more isolated

Harry: Yes

Dave: I think you’ve a better chance of achieving your goal in your area, than, you know? You’ve just said, everybody needs different things in their areas.

Ron: Yeah

Dave: Well you can’t have it all ways, if we’ve got one national voice, we’re all going to be the same. We’re all going to be

Several voices: No!

Terri: The national voice will take

Harry: DAVE, you can have a national voice and you can still fight for your own little corner

Terri: Uuhh. And therefore that’s when all tenants is working together

Dave: %Right%
This localism, championed by Dave in the excerpt above, has been identified as the core weakness of the tenants’ movement: its Achilles’ heel, the fundamental flaw that leaves it incapable of formulating effective strategy. ‘The whole character of housing struggles is precisely that of their isolation and disparateness’ wrote John Cowley (1979: 128), while Peter Saunders (1979: 125) dismissed tenant action as ‘specific, short-lived and far from solid’; tenants could produce the illusion of national action perhaps, in the rent strikes of the early 1970s for instance, but really these were just defensive actions, with limited objectives, taking place in isolation from each other. Ian Cole and Rob Furbey (1994: 153) took up this refrain, describing the tenants’ movement as ‘typically limited, localised, occasional and defensive’.

The strategic weakness ascribed by these writers to tenant localism is that it fails to recognise the changes in governance that have taken place since the 1970s. Tenants’ organisations have occupied themselves with their own communities, and their immediate housing management concerns. They have followed tenant management options, or competed for limited hand-outs from budget-strapped housing associations or councils, have voted for stock transfer, or arms-length management in order to see investment in their homes. Meanwhile, as Martin Wood (1994: 153) argued, these initiatives have served to reduce local authority control, and distract attention from the centralisation of housing policy and the fragmentation of its delivery; Wood lamented that the tenants’ movement as a whole ‘seem to have their heads buried firmly in the sand’. A commitment to localism has prevented the tenants’ movement from adapting to the new relations of housing governance. The housing powers of the local authority have been eroded through a long process of reductions in subsidy and restriction on borrowing, centralised rent-setting on market principles and stock transfer, while its ability to intervene in the delivery of local housing associations has been undermined by the creation of group structures from mergers and take-overs. Local authorities that have retained their housing stock, or established arms-length management companies, recognise that control over rents and investment rests solely with central government (Malpass 2005, Walker & Marsh 2003). At a regional tenants’ meeting, Susan argues that tenants appear incapable of changing their strategy to address power’s new location:
Susan: When you, when you speak to tenants, I mean tenants in my borough that have been around for donkeys years and probably should have retired many, many years ago, will recall when their main kind of remit, and where they got things done successfully, was lobbying their local councillor

Jane: Yeah

Najinder: Hmm

Susan: And I think the movement is still, in a sense, built up on that kind of premise, (.hh) you know that you have a group of people on an estate who, you go in and you lobby a local councillor, but there’s increasingly that kind of understanding that actually that doesn’t work anymore, because it’s not even from the local authority (.hh) that it’s, it’s, yes there’s mismanagement, there’s failure to address, there’s failure to consult, and all those kind of things, but actually underneath there’s this kind of sneaking suspicion, or at least understanding, that it comes from somewhere else, which is too far away to kind of address anyway.

Housing associations have not been exempt from this loss of autonomy and tenants addressing themselves to their board or senior management in order to bring about change, may find that strategic asset management, investment, and service delivery decisions are all influenced by the requirements of institutional lenders, or imposed through the demands of the regulator (Malpass 2000). Market forces, or market-like mechanisms, now prove to be the cause of local effects, and a wide range of institutions, some local, some global, all impact on housing policy and service delivery; a network of governance embraced and developed by Conservative and Labour governments (Stoker 2004).

New configurations of governance necessitate new strategies from tenants’ organisations, occupied as they are with the minutia of everyday participation processes. The tenants’ federation studied earlier in the chapter provides a rare example of discussion of the realignment of strategic direction that must take place:

Julia: We’ve still got to get down to the nitty gritty of what effects we have as an organisation and our particular organisation, because we work so
hard, we do work hard (.) to show the authorities what we feel and what
our tenants are needing, (.) so therefore, and nationally we are recognised
and we are looked upon by other federations and by other housing
associations outside the city that they’re holding us up as a flagship
because of the impact that we’ve made. The trouble is, we’re not making
the impact with the people that we really want to make an impact with

Mina: That’s where I was coming from

Julia: And that at the end of the day, is the government

The development in the UK over the last ten years of collaborative governance
systems evidenced in devolution, the creation of regional assemblies, of local
strategic partnerships and, now promised under the Coalition government, the
return of powers to the local authority, provides potential political opportunities to
a localist tenants’ movement (Somerville 2004). Within the outsourcing
strategies favoured by government, tenants discern opportunities to advance
participatory democracy and modify power imbalances at a local scale, but must
acknowledge the loss of influence over the national questions of housing costs,
housing supply, access to housing and the effects of housing and social policy
decisions. The goals of social movements are traditionally directed towards ‘the
organs of state power’ (Nicholls & Beaumont 2004: 112) and opportunities for
municipal partnerships and involvement in local welfare delivery can be
presented as routes to institutionalism and co-option (Pruijt 2003). Considered
as fields of collective action, the local and the national/global often appear as
mutually exclusive; the local being synonymous with the particular, and
associated with conservative and parochial tendencies (Harvey 1996), while the
national/global is conflated with the universal, and with autonomous militant
mobilisation (Featherstone 2005). This viewpoint privileges the nationally
organised social movements or the globally-connected campaigns with the
potential to achieve change, and sees tenants’ groups as operating at an
inconsequential level where little can be achieved.

There may, however, be advantages in maintaining a local focus if the aim is to
mobilise a popular movement that can attain influence on a national and even
international scale. While the feminist geographers Julie Graham and Katherine
Gibson (Gibson-Graham 2002) have pointed to the social construction of these
geographies of scale, and have stressed the global consequences of place-
based politics, social movement theorists tend to counsel a middle path, advising that local protests need to negotiate between scales of activism (Routledge 2003), concluding that the local group needs to be ‘nested within a distinctive counter-hegemonic movement at national and international scale’ (Somerville 2004: 149). Yet the local exerts a contrary pull on social movements, asserting itself as the primary territory of lived experience. For many groups it is the locality that provides their sense of motivation and that constitutes the source of their collective identities (Cumbers, Routledge & Nativel 2008). If the tenants’ movement is motivated by a sense of spatial justice, and its values and beliefs are expressed in direct relationship to a defined and bounded neighbourhood, localism may be its strength as well as its weakness. If its aims are to re-connect to traditions of co-operation and mutual aid and advance new contentions of public space then the target for mobilisation should necessarily be the local area. It is here that Susan feels it can have most effect. Involvement in housing policy, participating with landlords, becoming expert in the specialised and refined language of the professional, all these concerns are depicted as a sideshow in the following extract, as Susan recalls the time when her association had real impact:

Probably that was our most successful time as a tenants association because there were very physical things, and very practical things relating to our housing that we focused on. We took no notice of their, their meetings, focused on ours, did the campaigning, did the door-knocking, and didn’t care who we bit at, whichever political party, whichever officer, we just bit and said ‘we pay our rent’ [...] We’re still lost without the kind of things that the tenants associations used to do which was about their community. So its that kind of thing: our homes, our communities stuff; its not just about the practicalities of what happens, you know, in terms of the HRA [Housing Revenue Account], or how much money they’re going to dish out or whether they want us to be consulted or whether that actually means little to most people on our estates, [...] but its actually a bit more of the kind of, and we’ve lost a bit of that; I think we’ve lost a bit of that and its stuff we have to renew which is about how we bring our communities together as, as communities, and maybe have to focus a bit less on attending all those damn meetings.
Mobilisation around immediate material issues in a defined locality, campaigning for a localised conception of social justice, ‘our homes, our communities’, here is the strategic vision that exerts a powerful attraction for the tenants’ movement. It is a vision, as Susan points out, that requires tenants’ organisations to distance themselves from the patronage and the co-opting influence of housing providers and governmental agencies. This is a reminder that the threat of institutionalisation is just as potent in the political opportunities that enable national or international organisation as it is at the local scale, while mobilisation at a distance from the locality presents the additional threat of a loss of place-based identity. These concerns are addressed in the next section.

We have to be professional all the time

The classic model of social movement theory combines an analysis of the role of framing and identity construction activities with a keen practical awareness of the political opportunities and resources for mobilisation that enable successful collective action (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilley 2001). Social movement studies have charted the effect of patronage and support from local government or institutional charities on previously disruptive movements. They have observed the process of movement professionalisation triggered by patronage and noted the loss of contention and the growing influence of moderate and ‘responsible’ approaches in formerly contentious organisations (Piven & Cloward 1977, Jenkins & Eckert 1986). Tenants’ organisations, however, are keenly aware of the benefits that patronage brings and of the importance of resources to movement viability (Cress & Snow 1996). They value access to meeting space, transport, training and publicity resources (Furbey, Wishart & Grayson 1996), appear resolute about maintaining ‘responsible’ behaviour, and as this section identifies, they aspire, certainly in their national structures, to a professional standard of organisation.

I think quite honestly I think it’s raw cash that stops you from achieving anything. It’s just raw cash. We ain’t got it.

Richard, speaking at a regional tenants’ federation meeting, displays the sharp awareness of finance that now occupies his, and most other, strategic
organisations. The withdrawal of funding from many autonomous tenants’
organisations over the last decade has reversed the upward growth in the
number of tenants’ groups that once seemed an inevitable outcome of the
spread of participation across housing organisations. Research by the Tenant
Services Authority and Audit Commission published in 2010 shows that funding
for tenant participation from local authorities is now declining. Tenants’
federations, like the London regional organisation, or borough organisations like
Kirklees federation, now have service level agreements with their funding
authorities that tie their objectives and activities to governmental priorities in
return for a yearly grant. Susan explains:

There’s more and more of this kind of, like we are, as a regional
organisation, the kind of funding agreements so like you’re commissioned
to do something on their behalf rather than, or being something that is
completely independent and something separate

In seizing the political opportunities offered by government localism, tenants’
organisations find themselves embraced as local strategic partners,
reconstituted as arms-length agencies of municipal government, and addressed
as potential voluntary providers of outsourced services. The provision of
financial support and other resources that enable their mobilisation are
dependent on their commitment to specified performance targets (Nicholls &
Beaumont 2004). While a small number of autonomous tenants organisations
have been funded from a tenants’ levy, through ring-fenced contribution from
rents, most traditionally have received their core funding from their landlord,
whether local authority or housing association. The tenants’ federation studied
throughout this section complains that this funding relationship compromises
their independence; they are frequently reprimanded by their local authority for
the views they express in their newsletter, and are forced to assess the risk to
their sources of finance whenever they decide to articulate contentious views.

Linda: We’re not yes people to the Council.
Dave: But it can’t be right (.) that they can hold us to ransom over money
Terri: Umm
Dave: If we say the wrong word to them
Terri: Yeah

Dave: They can pull our funding. What would happen to our committee then? That’s a proper question. What would happen to our committee?

They look, optimistically, to national regulatory bodies for alternative sources of funding:

Harry: If they had (0.1) a different source of money they could do a lot better. Their hands are tied by being reliant on the council, er, for money. The local groups are reliant on the council for money. Whereas if they had a national, something like the TSA [Tenant Services Authority], that would give them money, they’d have the freedom to speak as they like and not be dictated to, say what you could write, what you couldn’t write, what information you could put out there and what information you couldn’t. The fact is we are being (0.1)

Mina: Manipulated?

Harry: Not manipulated, no. We’re being gagged

Ron: Constrained

Harry: The tenant is being gagged because of the political awareness of the councils

Terri: And the funding issues

Harry: And the funding issues. (0.5) So therefore if we had another funding stream, it would be far better. And that’s something we could do and it would benefit all tenants.

The national tenants’ organisation, Taroe, has its own funding difficulties, however, and is in no position to help others. Taroe is funded through the Tenant Empowerment Fund, and draws additional income from landlord accreditation and training services, but Tony, a Taroe director, argues that this is not enough to cover the organisation’s communications costs.

With £124,000 we can’t talk to our five million membership, that is, that is very, very difficult. So it’s hard to tell them that we’ve successfully achieved something.
These financial limitations are visible to Taroe’s membership. This regional federation can empathise, having recently experienced their own funding crisis:

Najinder: See the government should fund this national tenants movement on a regular basis so that continuity is there, because we don’t want to see one year funding is there, the next year, but, but=

Jane: Well precisely, well we reached crisis point a couple of years ago; will we be able to keep going?
Najinder: = within the system, so the national tenants’ movement is effective for the foreseeable future=
Jane: Absolutely, absolutely, yeah

Susan: Well, the CLG [Communities and Local Government Department]
Najinder: = because funding issues are the biggest problem that is going to derail the whole process.

Another tenants’ federation attributes the absence of national leadership and effective communication to Taroe’s lack of finance:

Harry: They've had no funding, or they've just got funding, they've just got a website but the fact is they’re so behind the times, they should have had this years ago, then they would have been a force to reckon with but they've been
Eileen: Lame duck
Harry: Yes they’ve been kept as a lame duck. They’ve been kept short of funds, so there’s been no communication

The funding of the National Tenant Voice (NTV), whose chief executive was appointed in April 2010, was no more financially secure, despite its formal incorporation as a non-departmental government body. Tony, who was appointed a director of its 50 strong governing Council in February 2010 explained:
The NTV will get £1.5m this next financial year, guaranteed. I already, because I’ve been on this working group of the NTV, have said that’s not enough. By the time they have seven staff in place, service the 50 person Council four times a year, which in itself will be explosively expensive, then have a board of 15 who meet every six weeks, then do some research, then communicate with the 10.8 million whatever it is people in the sector, one and a half million’s gone, long gone.

Even £1.5m was too much for Grant Shapps, the Coalition Government Housing Minister, who in July 2010, only a few months after its launch, withdrew funding from the National Tenants Voice as part of a programme of public spending cuts. Tony compared the insecure finances of the national tenants’ organisations with the healthy funding arrangements of the landlord trade bodies and housing professional associations. He argued that these organisations are funded by social housing organisations from tenants’ rents, without tenants’ agreement.

How many tenants out there in the housing association world know that altogether the 2,300 housing associations give the National Housing Federation £7.1m a year?

[...]

It’s a trade body, er, it takes £7m out of rents to fund it, that’s the affiliation fee without, it’s a levy but we don’t talk about that; the LGA [Local Government Association] gets £15m from local authorities to run it, and we [Taroe] got £124,000. But those levies aren’t talked about with tenants or council tax payers, they’re just done, just done deals.

The National Housing Federation lobbies on behalf of the interest of social landlords and campaigns on housing issues. Tony argues that if this trade body requires £7.5m to talk to its membership of housing associations, currently 1,200 associations (National Housing Federation 2010), there is a strong case to increase the funding of a body communicating with five million tenants, and to argue that this financial support should come from a landlord levy. The comparison between the national tenants’ organisations and the landlord and housing trade associations was made in 2006 by Ed Mayo, Chief Executive of the National Consumer Council, and James Tickell, former Deputy Chief
Executive of the National Housing Federation. They compared Taroe unfavourably to the well-resourced landlords’ lobby represented by the Chartered Institute of Housing, the Local Government Association, and the National Housing Federation, arguing that it was unable to uphold the tenant interest against the lobbying strength of the producers. The establishment of the National Tenant Voice, recommended by Martin Cave (2007), was intended to strengthen the power of the housing consumer, but Tony argues, not only was its funding inadequate but its presence in national policy circles made the tenant lobby even more fractured.

I would like to see one trade body for tenants in England. I think there’s far too many. You’ve got TPAS, you’ve got CCH, you’ve got the Nat Fed of TMOs, you’ve got the Nat Fed of ALMOs, even though they’re landlord organisations, or agent organisations, they’re still tenant focused. We’ve got TPAS, we’ve got TAROE, we’ve got now the National Tenant Voice, it’s just far too many, it’s a plethora, far too many, confuses people, there should be one trade body.

[...]

I mean, you’ve got the Nat Fed for Housing Association, er, employees and you’ve got the LGA for local authorities and we need a body for tenants. And only then will people take us seriously. But at the moment if we’re too good landlords will go and talk to somebody else and not us, so we don’t want that, we want one body.

The trade body model pursued by Taroe is inspired by the Cave Review’s articulation of a tenants’ movement in terms of conflict between the interests of consumers and producers. This market imagery appears to have captured tenant imaginations and inspired them to apply a consumerist discourse to the problem of tenant organisation. At his borough federation, John says:

We’ve seized upon the opportunities provided by the Hills report and the Cave report and we’re pushing on a door that was previously ajar and increasing our demands

This is also the view taken by Tony:
I think we’ve come leaps and bounds in the last 18 months. Since Cave’s report the whole world changed. There are opportunities, and door’s opened and you’ve got to get your foot inside that door and make sure they can’t shut it.

However, the strategy to shape Taroe into a consumer organisation that can compete with the producer lobby appears to signal a break with the value-identities of participatory democracy and the primacy of the locality that characterises the framing activity of the movement. Taroe’s board of directors do not serve as representatives, delegated by the regional or local federations, in the horizontal model of direct democracy advocated by many movement participants. The original Taroe structure of a board of 28 tenants drawn from regional, borough and local tenants’ organisations was overhauled after 2007. Directors of Taroe are now elected to the governing board as individuals and do not necessarily have to belong to a tenants’ organisation. Their activity as representatives may be confined to consultative work carried out at their regional conferences, and Tony indicates that one of the ways he measures communication with the membership is through the number of visitors to the Taroe website. Regional tenants’ organisations have criticised Taroe’s governance structure and advocated instead a model based on collective representation:

The ideal would be that there would be some sort of organisation that was based on delegates from area tenant federations like ours. Everybody here is an elected representative of a residents association, or a tenants association somewhere.

Sanjit argues for a model of direct democracy where Taroe directors would be mandated to represent the views of the defined constituency that elected them. Jane supports this view, arguing that the direct democracy model builds in accountability and ensures that national tenant leaders are speaking on behalf of their members, not themselves.

The structure that’s been established nationally never seems to recognise that or require that even, and I just think that’s fundamentally wrong.
She is fiercely critical of Taroe’s decision to adopt a standard corporate model where the director represents the interests of the company, not its membership.

It should be (.) a bottom-up process like we are; it should work by consensus rather than, um, you know; it should recognise regional differences, because there are, you know. [...] The system does not, you know, recognise our voice properly, even though we do a tremendous amount of work on the ground, and certainly nationally we’re not invited and one person representing nobody but themselves, you know, is the TAROE representative, I’m exaggerating, but you know.

The governance model pursued by Taroe seems to jettison the frame of ‘Real Democracy’ that appeared to be a defining identification of the tenants’ movement, with its foundation in Peter Baldock’s (1982) ‘housewives networks’ and its commitment to grass-roots decision-making. Tony acknowledges Taroe’s departure from the movement’s roots in collective representation and he associates it with the rise in the discourse of consumerism.

Interviewer: Would you agree that one of the defining things about the tenants’ movement is its representative structure?

Tony: I think it is defining, but I think it is changing, because, umm, we have to change, er, because society changes, er, and we should never be scared of change. We should embrace change, and we should make change work for us. Er, there used to be a lot more federations around, but, umm, er, so if we were based ourselves on federations and that, that, that model, we would be dying. (0.1) Because we hadn’t changed. So we had to change.

One of the keywords in the reinvention of Taroe as a consumer trade body is professionalism. Its effectiveness as an organisation, its ability to lobby government, and to influence landlords and their associations, depends on the development of a more professional image.
We’ve tried to professionalise what we do, the way we dress, er, the way we speak, the way we research now before we go to meetings, to be informed about the subject matter.

In part this is the consequence of running an organisation that now has a small staff team and premises, but Tony’s language is significant because it appears to distance Taroe further from the more chaotic and informal networks that characterise a tenants’ movement. Tony is talking about the Chartered Institute of Housing’s annual conference, held in Harrogate, an important event in the calendar of the social housing sector, where trade bodies, contractors and consultants exhibit. Taroe has received a free exhibition stand, courtesy of the Chartered Institute of Housing, for the last six years. Tony describes how tenants visiting the exhibition from across the country, and collecting their free gifts, pens, mugs and coasters, from the well-provisioned displays of housing construction companies or contractors, would leave their carrier bags at the Taroe stand to collect later, and how, as he says: ‘it just looked like a dumping ground sometimes.’

Last year we had to put a diktat out, and if there’s any bags on the stand, they will be removed and dumped. Because it’s not a resting place for tenants, “oh we’re back at the Taroe stand. Leave all your bags here and we’ll go off and have a cup of tea”. It’s, we’re a professional organisation

This glimpse of domesticity in the midst of a trade exhibition is symbolic, perhaps, of the value-identities of the movement. It indicates that Taroe is recognised as part of the movement, and that tenants are comfortable with their representatives. The Taroe stall is a safe place, a social movement haven (Fantasia & Hirsch 1995) in the bustle of the marketplace. But an exhibition stall that has domestic appeal, that is approachable, does not project an image that is comprehensible to the corporate institutions who have power and influence in that market. Tony contends:

I represent all these organisations who have within them five million people. There is an expectation if you do that, you need a suit, you need a collar and a tie, you need to act in a more mature way, and, and wouldn’t you be proud of being part of an organisation that looks good in the
marketplace – and Harrogate is the marketplace. So, no I don’t think we’re losing something, I think we’re actually gaining, and, and people want to be part of a professional organisation but we still have that human touch. We can still come and make people laugh. We can still have a joke. And we can still look foolish sometimes. But, we do that in-house, but not out there, because they look for the chink, and they go for the chink, so we have to be professional all the time. So, there’s, there’s ways and means and we got, gotta be, we gotta change colour, haven’t we, er, and that’s what we do.

The achievements of the three national tenants’ organisations in the post-Cave (2007) landscape have been considerable. By gaining a tenant majority on the working party to set up a National Tenant Voice they ensured that the blueprint for a consumer watchdog organisation took on elements of collective representation. They meet at least annually with the National Housing Federation and Chartered Institute of Housing, produce joint position papers and responses to government consultation, and lobby Ministers with claims to social rights though, Tony adds, ‘whether or not we influence government policy or not, I don’t know’. However, their identification as a consumer organisation, competing with producer trade bodies in a marketplace conflicts with the identities expressed in movement framing activity. Regional and borough tenants’ organisations call for a federated national structure that supports and networks local initiatives while maintaining the primacy of place-based politics, as Michael puts it:

If we co-ordinate that, and what we do in X [Location] is mirrored in Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle, London wherever and then TAROE then pull that together, its far more effective than X fighting for X.

The strategy advanced by Taroe, in contrast, adopts a top-down centralised model in which directors are trained to communicate the views of Taroe and, as Tony explains, go ‘out with a script, and there’s continuity of script and continuity of message’. The strategy of the national organisation appears to tell a different story from the ‘bundle of narratives’ (Fine 1995) that constructs the movement, where experiential knowledge opposes itself to professionalism, participatory democracy demands representation, and organisations based on principles of
community mutualism, remain rooted in a sense of place. If the national organisations adopt the profile of the consumer watchdog or trade body and discard the identity constructions of movement framing activity, the tenants’ interests they champion can only be the generic interests of the consumer. Instead of a belief in universal housing provision, mutual aid and the value of locality, a tenants’ trade body may only be able to lobby for choice, voice, information, quality, and redress, a significant loss of oppositional identities that challenge dominant housing policy and societal power relations, and that champion an insurgent spirit of democracy.

It’s going to take a long, long time

Alberto Melucci, writing in 1995, maintained that social movement theory had yet to answer the question of ‘how social actors form a collective and recognise themselves as part of it’ (Melucci 1995: 42). His collective identity theory addressed precisely that issue: it explained the construction of a collective, the formation and maintenance of unity. Paradoxically though, Melucci’s collective identity was not something fixed; it involved ‘continual investment and occurs as a process’ (Melucci 1988: 342). Its unity is never fully unified, perhaps; its collective is never completely identified.

Unity certainly eludes the tenants’ movement. It has three national organisations, none of which enjoys more than partial support. As a movement it is now characterised as a network of panels, rather than autonomous groups. It is tactically focused on the locality despite the complexity of the power relations it aims to challenge. It is conscripted by its institutional sponsors to serve governmental ends, and it displays only marginal support for the concept of, or the need for, national organisation. The goals it expresses are indistinct, its national organisations appear to distance themselves from the values that motivate the movement’s supporters and its ability to influence the direction of housing policy appears negligible.

Interviewer: How would you assess the achievements of the tenants’ movement?
Tony: I don’t think it’s very successful. ‘Cause it hasn’t got the power to be successful. (hh) You’ve got to have money, and then you’ve got to have charismatic leaders, um. […] So I don’t think, er, we have been very good at influencing the direction of housing policy.

Evaluated against Melucci’s definition of collective identity the movement appears lacking. Tenant identity talk seems to produce an action system that has no clear tactics or strategies. It evidences emotional commitment to a collective, but the development of group relations is inhibited by failures of efficacy, and it lacks a plan of action however tentative. Its potential as a movement to achieve change is indicated only by the unbounded political imaginaries constructed in tenant collective action frames (Featherstone 2005), and this framing activity is a reminder of the continuing potential of participation to become a political process in which new systems of democratic planning and decision-making evolve. As Suzy Croft and Peter Beresford (1989: 16-17) said ‘Post-war welfare has demonstrated that collective services without such [user] control are inherently paternalistic. The market-led alternative raises even larger questions about accountability and involvement.’ It is not the intention here to author the ‘plan for change’ that Carol Mueller (1994) regards as essential to the definition of collective identity in a tenants’ movement. But it is possible to envisage a mobilisation around tenant collective action frames that might articulate a vision of public services as truly public, as expressions of co-operation and mutualism achieved through direct democracy. Tenants would need to engage in more than the boundary marking, frame-bridging and frame amplification processes that have been observed to construct such a movement, however. It would require the locality-based groups, informal tenants’ panels and focus groups to acknowledge their cohesion as a movement and to take responsibility for brokering solidarities between individuals and localities, and for inspiring feelings of efficacy not submission. To retain the movement’s values of direct democracy, this process of networking would need to be led from below, and amplify the contentions of the localities with the intent to develop a movement that articulated a distinctive challenge to the hegemonic enclosure of social policy.

There are inevitable obstacles to the development of such a political programme from the framing activity of tenants. The individual and organisational rivalries,
the embodied submission and orientation to authority would be difficult to overcome. The need to extract and distil a series of oppositional claims from framing narratives that are dominated by the themes of welfare reform could prove a more significant barrier. Contentions around social citizenship in these frames are founded on an idealised version of public housing; many tenants however, experience the reality of quasi-public landlordism as oppressive, and the expansion of behavioural regulation and disciplinary discourses among social landlords continues to indicate that public services can serve exclusionary and divisive purposes (Card 2001, Flint 2006). It was the repressive aspects of public housing that generated initial support for participation, and it is the discourse of participation that now enables its positive attributes to be expressed. The vocabulary of unity that is articulated by tenants to define a movement is not the collectivising effect of public services. The unifying narrative for council tenants, housing association tenants, leaseholders and residents today is the discourse of public service reform. This is the hegemonic articulation that now provides the means and defines the strategy for tenant collective action.

For a movement to develop from the local and the particular and to formulate a collective challenge, its participants must have the desire to take that course of action, and those who share that desire must take the responsibility (Massey 2004, Cumbers, Routledge & Nativel 2008). While powerful contentions of social citizenship and direct democracy distinguish a tenants’ movement, and its constituents hunger for a network that supports collective action at a local level, the political opportunities of participation provide the movement with the institutional resources and language in which tenant collective action can be conceived. The opportunities presented by the consumerist messages fundamental to public service reform have led the national tenants’ organisation to model itself as a trade body or consumer lobby, while the articulation of community as an institution of governance has channelled tenants’ federations and associations into activities deserving of patronage. The image of autonomous tenants’ organisations campaigning in the neighbourhood has metamorphosed into a myriad of panels and forums immersed in a landlord-administered participation process that promises eventual recognition. The strategic possibilities of participation appear to offer a substitute for movement mobilisation, one that accords with tenant feelings of inadequacy and compliance, and that offers an adequate impression of progress. Certainly a
sense of patient optimism imbues much of tenant discourse, illustrated in this comment from Cheryl at a TPAS conference:

We’re still in this, what the gentleman over there would call a class system, and my obs-, I’ve only been involved as a council tenant for about the last 12 or 13 years, and my understanding is that people like us, now being given a voice, coming to conferences like this, etc has only been a recent development historically and its going to take a long, long time but hopefully one day it will come and things will be much better as how we’re looked at as council or tenants of whatever organisations.

In participation tenants recognise a political environment that grants them social existence and presents them with opportunities to rehearse contentious identities. It is a realm of possibility, where universal claims to rights and democracy might be articulated from the supremacy of market processes and governmental strategies. There is inevitability to this process; participating in the practices that cement these dominant identities presents the immanent possibility of contesting them, as tenants at the TPAS conference suggest. It is just a matter of time:

Cheryl: It’s just going to take a long time
Robert: It’s a big wheel

The optimism of tenants’ movement participants reflects Judith Butler’s contention that dominant ways of thinking and doing can be changed by becoming savvy in their ways, as Michael indicates:

We’ve got smarter as a body of people. I think we can articulate far better than we could a few years ago. I think slowly but slowly we’re learning

This is the politics of possibility (Gibson-Graham 2006); the belief that reiteration does not have to mean repetition, and that one day it will mean change. As Jean, in her tenant management organisation, says:

It’ll be a long hard fight but we will certainly get there in the end
'Social transformation occurs,' Butler (2000: 14) says, ‘through the ways in which daily social relations are rearticulated’. This would suggest that tenant identity talk effects change through its day to day resignification of dominant discourses, and that the engagement of tenants in landlord panels, in board rooms, or in the meetings of tenants’ organisations can accomplish a ‘critical subversion’ of the hegemonic articulation of participation, and impact on the direction of social policy more generally (Butler 2004b: 334). There is subversive promise in the ambivalent encounters in which the rituals of power and convention are reiterated and Butler defines a social movement as a:

‘political contestation that is not a “pure” opposition, a “transcendence” of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labour of forging a future from resources inevitably impure’ (Butler 1993: 241).

The difficulty of this labour is rightly stressed. There is little opportunity to gauge success, and every possibility of failure, and practices that have radical intent may achieve regulatory outcomes (McNay 1999). By persistently reclaiming values of social citizenship, direct democracy and other excluded identities in the regulated improvisation of participation, tenant framing permits a new hegemonic formation to appear in housing policy. It does so, however, only ideally, and there is no guarantee of change (Butler 2000: 150). Nevertheless, Butler appears to believe that social movements can do no more than present the possibility of change, and that to continue collectively to rehearse excluded identities, and to resist the naming and containing power of discourse, is all that can be achieved. This assessment of the capabilities of the domesticated social movement reprises the theory of the performative, and restates assumptions about the power of voice to change social relations simply through its utterance. It is a theory of change that is consistent with the interpretation of participation as a process in which the simple presence of new players influences the outcome. It is one familiar to tenants who demonstrate in their daily reiterations of participation the impact of performative voice in transforming civil rights into social contentions, and in constructing the identities of a social movement. It is a ‘plan for change,’ therefore, that is provided by the authorised discourse of participation, and that is made available to tenants as a political opportunity in the process of public service reform.
To understand the movement constructed in tenant identity talk it is necessary to address the interpellative effects of power and to recognise that movements can be called into existence by a discourse that seeks to deny them. Despite its individualising intent, participation has hailed tenants with collectivising narratives. It has provided the cognitive frameworks, the forums, and the opportunities for tenants to act collectively as subordinate partners in a hegemonic articulation. Participation has provided tenants with a collective ‘voice’, and in its reiterative rituals, it presents them with the opportunities to reclaim other voices, and to force the return of the ‘constitutive outside’ that heralds the possibility of change. It proffers, too, a potential strategy to achieve this change: a belief in the performative power of voice to enact what it describes. It is in this adherence to performative enactment that the outcome of tenant identity talk can be evaluated and the tenants’ movement may finally be understood.

Without a strategy, including ‘goals, means and a consideration of environmental constraints’ (Mueller 1994: 246), tenant identity talk fails to construct a unified collective actor. Instead it achieves the inauguration of a ‘performative’ tenants’ movement. This is a movement of identities, not actors, that is talked into existence as an emotional unity, and as an articulation of hope and possibility. As a collective it is enacted by the performative ability of voice to initiate the social relations it names. It is a discursive construction of contentious claim-making that is enabled and constrained by regulatory identifications. It is a movement born in the reiterative strategies of power, rather than in the strategies of change; a movement, therefore, of possibilities not plans.
Chapter 10

Conclusion: possibilities of a tenants’ movement

This research has investigated the identity work of tenants engaged in participation in social housing in order to understand the contemporary manifestations of a tenants’ movement. The concluding chapter returns to the questions that launched the research to review the tenants’ movement that appears from the evidence and to evaluate its role in pursuing the politics of possibility. In doing so, the task, as Judith Butler (1997a: 17) warns, is to steer clear of both ‘politically sanctimonious forms of fatalism’ and ‘ naïve forms of political optimism’.

It has been argued here that the interpellative call of participation provides a discourse of rights that can engender a spirit of efficacy and forge bonds of common cause. It enables the construction of a movement identity enunciated through statements of value, articulations of antagonism and a commitment to collective action. Three interpretive frames, or identity constructions, have been identified that provide diagnostic, prognostic and motivational identities for a tenants’ movement and these identities present an image of a social movement, demarcated by boundary markers, knitted together by emotional ties, and expressed in contentious claims to rights. Evaluated as a process of collective identity construction, this identity work fails to mobilise tenants around a coherent strategy, or enable agreement on aims and means, and the awakening of efficacy that initiates the construction of a movement cannot sustain its manifestation as a unified collective actor. The tenants’ movement invoked in participation is a performative construction rather than a coherent entity.

A performative social movement denotes the domestication and resurgence of collective action in hegemonic articulations whose pretended universality is penetrated by the return of excluded and subordinate identities. It describes a movement that is constituted by regulatory discourse, which is contingent on that discourse and constrained by it. This social movement is enacted through the contentious reclamation of excluded identifications and, conversely, through persistent attributions of subordination and submission. The collective action it
inspires is mobilised through discourses that present the alluring possibility of change and recruit it for regulatory effect. The dissonance that this performance enacts, challenges the foreclosure of what it is possible to think and do, and presents the recurring possibility of the emergence of new articulations. In the resilience of these contentious claims it is possible to glimpse the collective construction of counter-hegemonic discourses and to understand that political contest over the direction of public policy is far from concluded.

Framing social citizenship

This research has evidenced the performance of a tenants' movement from excluded narratives of collective provision, the construction of values of mutualism and co-operation, and the promotion of organisational principles of direct democracy. It has therefore contributed to studies of social movements that point to social citizenship and social justice as the goal of contemporary protests (Nicholls & Beaumont 2004, Roth 2000). The resurgence of excluded identifications evident in tenant identity work points to the political fragility of the hegemony of a programme of public service restructure that has insinuated the transformative dynamics of choice and voice throughout the welfare state. Where a convergence of meaning was once achieved between the desires of social welfare movements and the dogma of the libertarian right (Williams 1994), floating signifiers such as empowerment, community, and participation have become now sites of contestation; they still function to connect the discourses of a hegemonic project, but it is clear that they have the potential to point in new and different directions. Tenant framing activity expresses the image of the citizen-consumer as an identity that surpasses the specifics of its customer relationship, and endows it with a collective political voice. It constitutes a new public out of public participation, articulating a narrative of social struggle in the pursuit of rights of equality and invoking a collective that can be conceived of as a social movement.

It is clear from this research that the shared experience of housing tenure can act as a basis for collective identity constructions, and that the aspects of collective citizenship implied in social housing may operate as an impetus for mobilisation. Janet Newman and John Clarke (2009) have pointed to the power of public services to constitute their public and to act as a focus for public
imaginations around the values of solidarity and commonality. In a similar manner, social housing appears to serve, at least potentially, as the inspiration for feelings of collective belonging, and to enable the promotion of values of co-operation and a spirit of collective action. It can be articulated as an expression of public ownership and public space to construe the concept of community as a forum for direct democracy and mutual relations of care. In regenerating in ideal terms the concept of public housing as a universal service, and in extolling the virtues of mutuality in specific opposition to private ownership, tenant identity work exerts pressure on governmental themes of ‘big society’ and the previous incarnations of active citizenship, recalling more democratic models of community governance concealed within the one, albeit dominant discourse (Somerville 2005b). In continuing, persistently, to demand equality and recognition for the inhabitants of a stigmatised and residual social housing service, it makes claims to rights that cannot be honoured, and gnaws at the contradictions in dominant definitions of citizenship. In maintaining collective solidarities in the face of individualising trends the construction of a tenants’ movement signals a submerged popular process in which the meanings of citizen and consumer, choice and voice and, out of these pairings, equality and justice are being contested and re-imagined.

The political opportunity of domestication

In returning social movement theory to housing studies, this research has identified the articulations of social rights that emerge as an effect of tenant participation and citizen governance. These expressions of social citizenship may be generated, advanced and developed through the political opportunities of particular structures of governance. The suggestion that the tenants’ movement should be considered as a performative enactment of these contentions, argues for a rethinking of the narrative of social movement institutionalisation and the political opportunity structures in collaborate governance. A contribution of this research has been to turn the dominant narrative of social movement co-option on its head. Instead of finding once autonomous contestants rendered docile by state sponsorship and the many technologies of citizenship (Mayer 2000, Pruijt 2003, Kavoulakos 2006, Böhm,
Dinerstein, & Spicer 2010), it has identified the co-optive strategies of governance that constitute a contentious social movement.

This inversion of the traditional notion of political opportunity entails a return to Alberto Melucci’s insistence on movement identity as a process of continuous reconstruction, and therefore of continuous change, to consider that social movements entering into political opportunities may not be the same as the movements that emerge from them. Rather than theorising a social movement with a defined and structured identity that seeks advantage in the opportunities opened up by systems of governance, it is possible to envisage movements as an effect of the identity constructions of political opportunity. This research does not find a tenants’ movement institutionalised or co-opted by public participation; it discovers a system of participation that constitutes a tenants’ movement. This performative movement is a product of power relations and fully immersed in technologies of citizenship. It is not a resistance movement; on the contrary, it acts as an agent of governance, generating participation and fostering empowerment to recruit new subjects into relations of power (Cruikshank 1999). In enabling the construction of subject-citizens, however, the tenants' movement articulates new identities of citizenship and in reproducing power relations of subjection, advances new possibilities of democracy.

This depiction of a performative tenants movement advances the application of governmentality theory to social movement studies and housing policy; venturing beyond the duality of power / resistance to discover, not just a public unwilling to accept the identifications of government technologies, but to chart instead the construction of a contentious collective enabled by the failure of naming discourses. It argues that resistance is not an exercise of free will or the ability to dodge the command of discourse; it is the performative exercise of discursive identities to reclaim excluded possibilities. The call to order of discourse is constitutive and subjects do not elude this social recognition; they do not enjoy the freedom to resist the power exerted on them, but they can assume that power in collective action. To argue that social movements exist within power relations and exert power over others as governmentality theory does (Cruikshank 1999, Dean 1999), is to miss the point that social movements can be constituted through the technologies of collaborative governance and in reproducing those technologies mobilise against them. Resistance, exemplified
in this study of the tenants’ movement, is an effect of the regulated repetition of power and the possibility of its reversal (Butler 1997a).

The politics of possibility

The tenants’ movement that emerges from participation is not on the road to liberation from subjection, but it may be able to widen the possibilities available to tenants as subjects. Participation is ‘recognition at an expense’ in Judith Butler’s phrase (1993: 121). Social movements articulated into hegemonic formations are changed as much, if not more, than they change. Tenants, interpellated as equals, find themselves moulded into the restrictive identities of a regulatory project, at the same time as they are empowered to challenge their subordination. The extent to which they are able to push the boundaries of hegemonic foreclosure, and their success in re-articulating these identities, has to be weighed carefully against the cost they pay in further subjection. What can be achieved through participation is clearly limited; what can be lost along the way may be unconscionable.

The level of participation achieved in the management of social housing as a result of welfare restructure is far higher than evidenced in any other reformed public service (Boyne & Walker 1999). The performative effect of voice has infused the sector and this immersion in participation is enthralling; it dominates the lives of the social housing tenants who donate their voluntary resources as directors, inspectors, or panel members (CLG 2009c). A discourse is hegemonic to the ‘extent that it can articulate different visions of the world in such a way that their potential antagonism is neutralised’ (Laclau 1977: 161). Participation has been extremely successful in achieving this strategic task, hailing tenants as equals to generate new rule-governed identities that sustain the activation of consumers and the ‘responsibilisation’ of citizens (Clarke 2005). In its consistent and repeated invocation it has achieved a wholesale interpellation of tenant participants as ‘substitute managers’ (Sullivan 2001: 34), and propagated the professional tenant as an image of identity. The dominance of these reform discourses is not under threat. The institutional changes made to the supply and management of social rented housing, alongside other public services, have embedded this hegemonic formation; they have embodied
marketised practices and made familiar consumerist discourses. An immediate future in which investment in public housing plunges, new social housing tenants lose their security of tenure, affordability worsens through housing benefit cuts and housing association rents are pushed further towards market levels does not offer hope to the contentions of a social movement championing denigrated ideas of social citizenship (HM Treasury 2010).

If this was a social movement confronting power rather than innate to it, the task of the tenants’ movement would be to clarify its framing contentions and extend its points of antagonism. It might form explicit links with other service user campaigns and make sustained demands for an extension of participatory democracy into all aspects of society. Achieving a more critical consciousness (Freire 1993), it could explicitly oppose the extension of the market into public services and the privatisation of public space; it might forge alliances with a range of urban struggles that seek to ‘reclaim the city’ (Mayer 2009). This tenants’ movement would be distinguishable as an oppositional movement, even if it remained marginalised and ineffective. No tenants’ movement approaching this level of definition appears for observation. What is evident instead is an oppositional tenant consciousness within dominant hegemonic formations, one capable of transgressing the boundaries of thought and action, and one that presents the immanent possibility of new political articulations.

This research suggests that the mobilisation of urban movements and ‘poor people’s movements’ cannot be theorised through a study of effectiveness alone, and it underlines the importance of identity work in understanding movement formation and the exercise of contentious politics. Service user groups, welfare campaigns and locality-based associations that rise up without the support of well-resourced and resilient social movement organisations may be all but invisible as collective actors; their mobilisation leaves little trace and their quest for recognition and acceptance may speed their incorporation into local systems of governance. The study of their material demands, the injustices done to them, the opportunities open to them and the resources they are able to field provides a fleeting image of such movements but fails to gauge their power to generate fresh meanings, articulate new claims, and challenge the ‘common sense’ of dominant discourse. It should be clear from this research that a movement can be theorised as a ‘bundle of narratives’ (Fine 1995) and that the process of collective identity construction can have transformative effect.
Contentious identities may develop, be maintained and find articulation inside dominant discourses and movements can be mobilised through the discovery and reclamation of excluded narratives and abjected claims. However, such movements rarely escape the subjection that undermines their potential and that, in its embodied repetition, constrains them in their regulated identities. In articulating difference the tenants’ movement cannot avoid reiterating its submission and that effectively undercuts any frame of mobilisation before it can be pieced together. Interpellated into the image of the professional, tenant participants may seek to identify not with antagonism but with a myth of unity, while organisations that seek to lead the movement adopt the market antagonism of the consumer to provide legitimacy, and risk the loss of more complex and perplexing identities. Frames of collective identity that could form the basis for a manifesto are never made explicit. Without strategy or action plans, the tenants’ movement could be mistaken for the inconsequential coalescence of the marginal and vulnerable.

Only under exceptional circumstances will ‘poor people’ become defiant, Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward (1977: 7) argued. Defiance is, however, only part of the story. In the impossibility of an oppositional movement with a strategy for change, what appears as a tenants’ movement emerges from inside a programme of welfare restructuring, and is given voice by its regulated practices. That voice appears to speak of excluded narratives, different priorities, and unmapped directions. In participation, and in the day to day repetition of that regulated ritual, tenants construct the outline of a movement that can challenge the contradictions at the heart of welfare reform. This is a ‘domesticated’ movement that, nevertheless, advances principles of direct democracy and new concepts of public good, and in its framing activity and identity talk contests the enclosure of public space and the foreclosure of public spheres. In the face of a range of discursive identity practices targeted on social housing and acting on the subjectivity of tenants, this tenants’ movement is evidence of the persistence of concerted dis-identification (Butler 2000). It may be a movement of the powerless, but its articulation of collective identities signals the instability of power. The performative achievement that is the tenants’ movement is evidence of a continuing contest over social citizenship and the restructuring of the welfare state.
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## Appendix 1: Participation in Focus Groups and Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Type of Tenants Organisation</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2nd August 2008</td>
<td>TPAS Conference</td>
<td>20 people: 14 women and 6 men, 4 BME, 8 housing association &amp; stock transfer tenant board members, 2 arms-length management tenant board members, 4 from residents groups, 4 from tenant panels, 2 from tenant forums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3rd August 2008</td>
<td>TPAS Conference</td>
<td>14 people: 10 women and 4 men, 2 BME, 4 residents groups, 6 housing association tenant board members, 3 tenant panels, 1 Individual Voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>13 March 2009</td>
<td>Regional Tenants Federation</td>
<td>7 people: 4 women and 3 men, 3 housing association, four council tenants, 2 tenants panels, 5 residents groups, 1 &amp; stock transfer association tenant board,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 April 2009</td>
<td>Residents Associations</td>
<td>16 people: 10 women and 6 men, 14 council tenants, 2 owner-occupiers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>21 April 2009</td>
<td>Borough Tenants Federation (active in Defend Council Housing)</td>
<td>10 people: 7 women and 3 men, 1 leaseholder, 1 BME, 1 housing association &amp; eight council tenants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>11 May 2009</td>
<td>Regional Tenants Federation</td>
<td>6 people: 2 women and 4 men, 1 BME, council tenants &amp; members of borough panels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1 August 2009</td>
<td>TPAS Conference</td>
<td>16 people: 10 women, 6 men, 4 BME, 6 housing association tenant board members, 4 residents groups, 2 tenant management organisations, 4 tenant panels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2 August 2009</td>
<td>TPAS Conference</td>
<td>15 people: 9 women, 6 men, 2 BME, four housing association tenant board members, 6 residents groups 1 arms-length</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>5 August 2009</td>
<td>Tenant Management Organisation</td>
<td>4 people: 3 women and 1 man, 3 council tenants, one owner-occupier, 4 TMO board members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>7 September 2009</td>
<td>Borough Tenants Federation</td>
<td>8 people: 4 women and 4 men, 8 council tenants, 2 arms-length management tenant board members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>4 May 2010</td>
<td>Tenant Panels</td>
<td>11 people: 7 women and 4 men, 7 council tenants, 2 housing association tenant, 1 owner-occupier, 1 private tenant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>24 July 2010</td>
<td>TPAS conference</td>
<td>10 people, 6 women and 4 men, two housing association tenant board members, 1 council arms-length tenant board member, one federation chair, one national federation member, two tenant panels, three residents groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>28 July 2009</td>
<td>Borough Tenants Federation</td>
<td>2 people: one man, one woman, council tenants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>7 October 2009</td>
<td>Regional Tenants Federation</td>
<td>1 man: retained council tenant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>28 October 2009</td>
<td>Borough Tenants Federation</td>
<td>1 man: council tenant, arms-length management &amp; Taroe board member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>23 November 2009</td>
<td>Residents Association</td>
<td>1 woman: council tenant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>25 November 2009</td>
<td>Residents Association / Tenants Panel</td>
<td>2 men: 1 former arms-length management tenant board member, both tenant inspectors for council arms-length organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>1 December 2009</td>
<td>Regional Tenants Federation</td>
<td>1 man: council tenant, active in Defend Council Housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>30 January 2010</td>
<td>National Tenants Federation</td>
<td>1 man: housing association tenant, stock transfer tenant board member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Tenant Director</td>
<td>Role Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 5</td>
<td>February 2010</td>
<td>Tenant Director</td>
<td>1 man: housing association tenant board, federation chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 12</td>
<td>February 2010</td>
<td>Tenant Director</td>
<td>1 man: arms-length management board</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B Numbers of participants in focus groups do not include 4 participants who were subsequently interviewed
Appendix 2: TPAS Conference Survey 2009

This five question qualitative survey was included in the TPAS 2009 delegates’ conference pack. Delegates were invited to hand in the completed survey to the Leeds Tenants Federation exhibition stall where the researcher was present. The survey began with a letter of introduction:

Hello, you are invited to participate in a research study about the English tenants’ movement by filling in the survey over the page.

This survey is quite short and it asks your views on resident involvement. I’m sure you will enjoy filling it in and thinking about the answers. You may want to discuss the questions with your friends over a drink!

When you have finished the survey please hand it in at the Leeds Tenants Federation stand in the Exhibition Hall. I will be happy to answer any questions you might have about this research.

This research is for a PhD Doctoral dissertation being undertaken by a member of staff at Leeds Metropolitan University and is being funded by the University. The results of this research may also be published in housing journals and in tenant magazines. No personal details and nothing that could be used to identify you will be included in this research when it is published.

Thank you very much,

Quintin Bradley

Associate Lecturer in Housing Studies, Leeds Metropolitan University The Northern Terrace, Queen Square Court, Civic Quarter. Leeds LS1 3HE.
Tel. (0113) 8121964 Mobile: 07531 950966

You may also want to contact the Research Supervisor, Prof. Ian Strange at Leeds Metropolitan University. Tel. (0113) 8127638
(Please write in the space provided)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Why did you get involved in the tenants movement originally?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>What do you hope to achieve through your involvement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>What do you feel that tenants have in common?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>How are social housing tenants treated by the media and by politicians?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>How confident are you that tenants can change things and why?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank you for your time in filling out this survey. Please hand in your completed survey form at the Leeds Tenants Federation exhibition stand in the main hall, where you can also talk to the researcher.
## Appendix 3: Focus Group Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Testing For:</th>
<th>Question and prompts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Aims, motivation**                                   | **1. What do tenants gain from participation with landlords that they would not gain otherwise?**  
Prompts:  
- What have you achieved through participation?  
- What would happen if you did not participate with your landlord? |
| **Boundary marking, consciousness of injustice, awareness of disadvantage, values** | **2. How are social housing tenants seen in society today?**  
Prompts:  
- What image of social housing do you see in the media?  
- How do politicians talk about social housing tenants?  
- How do you think housing staff look at tenants? |
| **Mobilisation, efficacy, feelings of shared fate**     | **3. How easy is it to organise tenants around housing or community issues?**  
Prompts:  
- What is the response when you try to recruit to a tenants and residents group?  
- Do you think that tenants and residents share common issues?  
- What support do you get when you organise a community event, or campaign? |
| **Strategy, goals, tactics & action plans, efficacy, values** | **4. How effective are tenants’ organisations in achieving their goals?**  
Prompts:  
- What do you feel you have achieved in your tenants group?  
- What do you want to achieve?  
- What has changed as a result of your participation / tenants’ group? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy, group identification, efficacy</th>
<th>5. What do you think the role of a national tenants’ movement should be?</th>
<th>Prompts:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thinking about TAROE, or the National Tenants Voice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How much are you effected as tenants by national policy?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Appendix 4: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Testing For:</th>
<th>Question and prompts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Background data for analysis** | 1. In what ways are you involved in tenant participation?  
Secondary questions:  
- Are you a tenant, leaseholder or resident?  
- Who is your landlord – are they an RSL, ALMO or Council? |
| **Values**  
Emotional response  
Individual identity | 2. Why did you get involved in tenant participation in the first place?  
Prompts:  
- What appealed to you about the idea?  
- Were you attracted to it because of your personal beliefs or values? |
| **Values**  
Individual identity  
Efficacy | 3. What do you want to achieve through your involvement?  
Prompts:  
- In your personal development  
- In your personal quality of life  
- In wider terms – in improvements to your neighbourhood; in changes in society |
| **Group identification**  
Communication  
Developing relationships | 4. What do you feel that tenants have in common?  
Prompts:  
- Do people on the estate share the same issues or concerns?  
- If you met someone from another tenants group would you find you had experiences in common? |
| **Grievance**  
Out-groups  
Shared injustice  
Group | 5. How do you feel tenants are treated in society?  
Prompts:  
- By the media  
- By politicians  
- By landlords |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6.</th>
<th>Do you feel personally that you are treated this way?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Secondary question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>- What does it mean to you to be a tenant?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7.</th>
<th>How confident are you that tenants can change things?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Prompt:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>- Can think of a time when you felt you changed your landlord’s plans, or stopped something from happening?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>- How many times does that happen?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8.</th>
<th>How do tenants successfully influence decision-making?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Prompts:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>- When you take part in meetings with the landlord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>- In terms of improvements to the neighbourhood and changes to the landlord’s decisions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>9.</th>
<th>How do you feel on the occasions when you cannot influence decision-making?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Prompts:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>- Can you think of a time when you didn’t get what you want, a time when you wanted to change something but the landlord just went ahead anyway?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10.</th>
<th>What does the phrase ‘the tenants’ movement’ meant to you?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Prompts:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>- Have you heard of the phrase?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>- Do you think tenants organisations need to organise nationally?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>- What do you think a national tenants’ organisation should be aiming for?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>