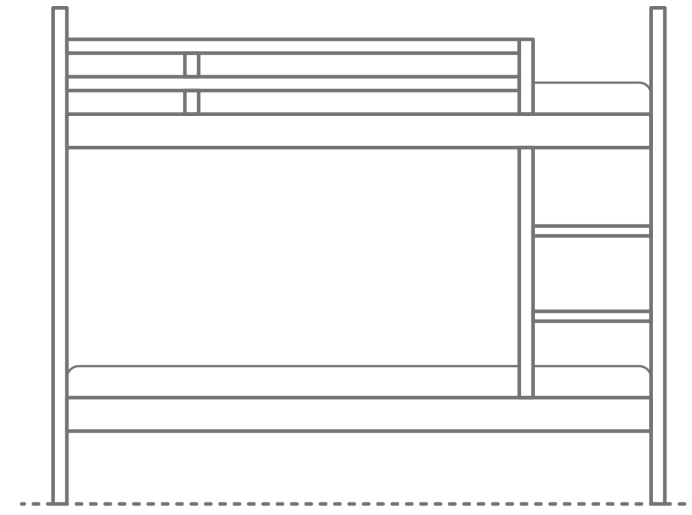
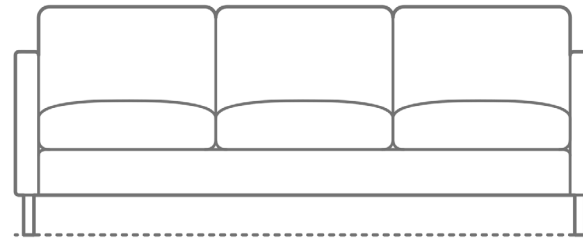
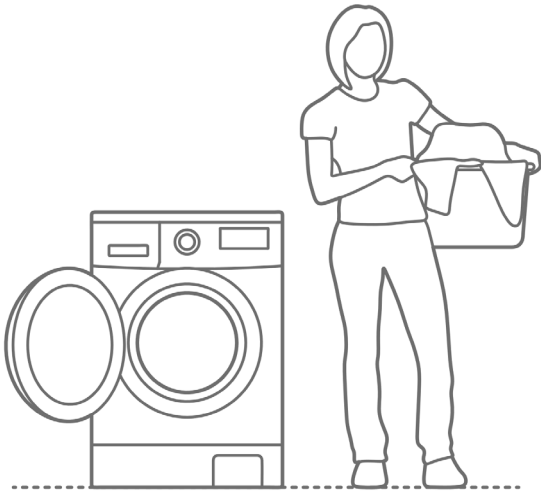


# 'Are You Ready For Independent Living?'

## Conditionality Practices in Women's Temporary Housing

Melissa Fielding

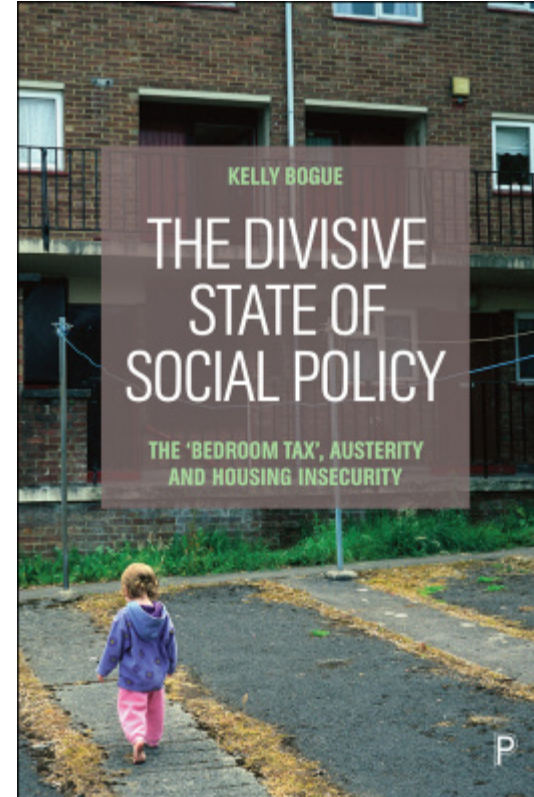


# Argument

In this presentation, I want to trace out the connections between austerity, local governance, and social housing conditionality, arguing that austerity continues to shape local governance ten years after its implementation by the Coalition government. By examining the processes of social housing conditionality in the East Midlands, I argue that austerity, as a 'more-than-fiscal' project, is a form of governance which in turn shapes the personal and material lives of those trying to access more permanent housing.

# Literature – Part 1

- Austerity literature –
  - The greatest cuts were made to the Department of Communities and Local Government, which lost over half of its government funding (Gray & Barford, 2018).
  - The effects of which have been deeply variegated across the UK (Gray and Barford, 2018)
  - Bailey et al (2014) ask how, on a local level, government strategies deliver the cuts, and how these strategies are evolving?
  - Ed Kiely (2020) argues that the introduction of new strategies on a local government level are a mode of ‘institutional camouflage’.



## Women and Austerity

The economic crisis and the future for gender equality

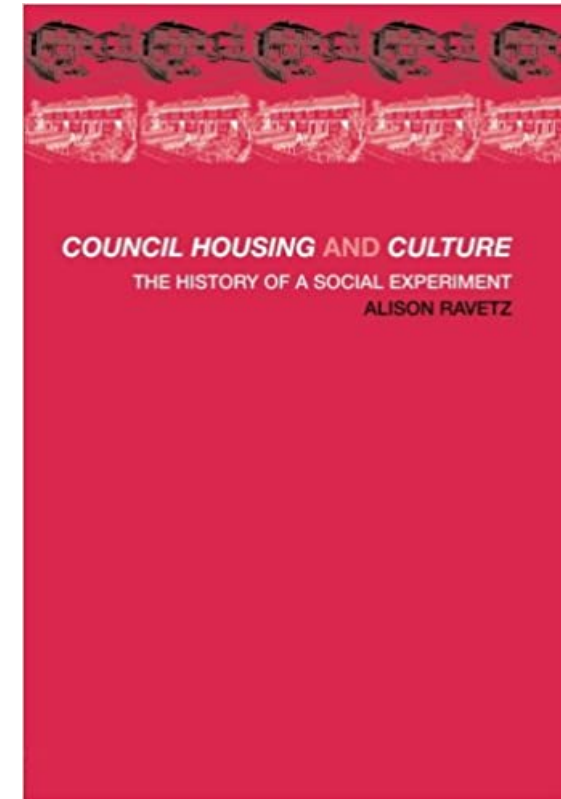
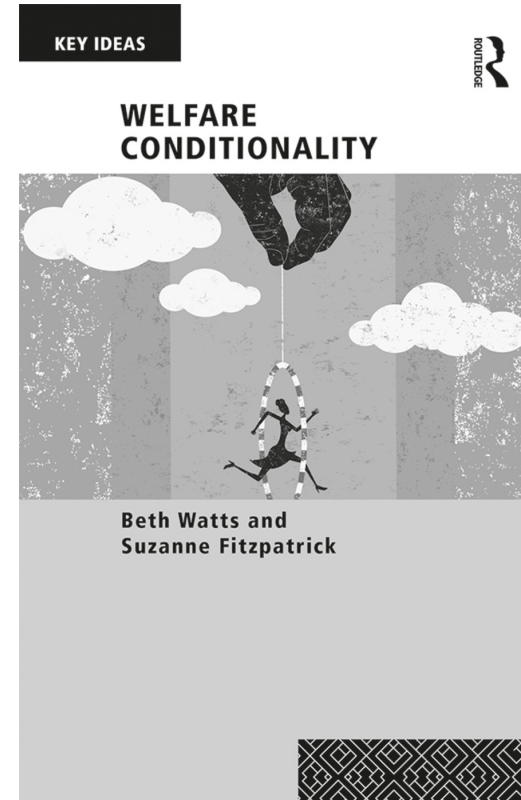
*Edited by*  
**Maria Karamessini and  
Jill Rubery**



Routledge IAFPE Advances in Feminist Economics

# Literature – Part 2

- Conditionality denotes the material and discursive conditions that must be met to acquire and exercise the formal or substantive right to remain present within a national territory and/or to access entitlements and social goods (Landolt and Goldring, 2015, p.857)
- Ravetz, A., 2003. Council housing and culture: The history of a social experiment. Routledge.
- ‘intensification’ of conditionality (Watts, & Fitzpatrick, 2018)



# Research Questions

- How has austerity impacted conditionality in social housing governance?
- How has this been experienced on a personal level?



# Temporary Housing in the East Midlands

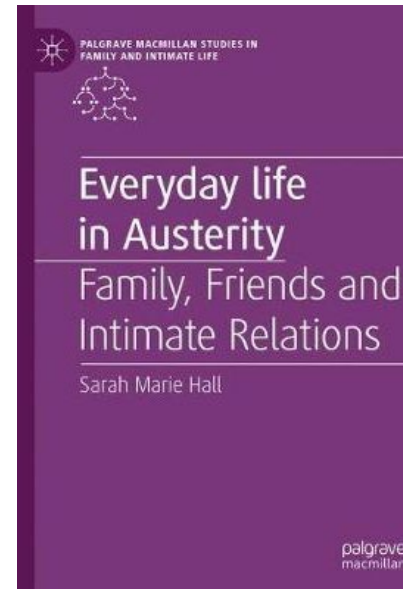
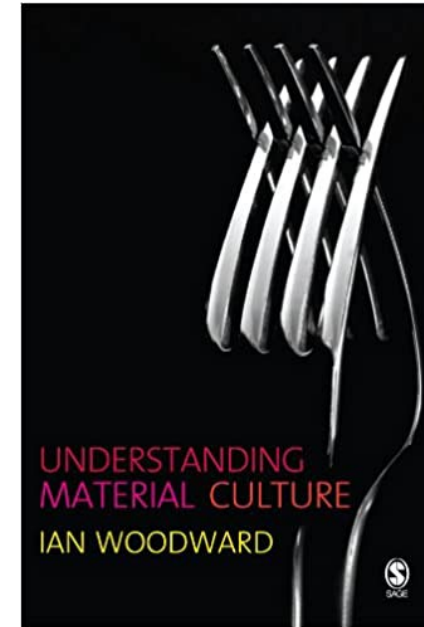
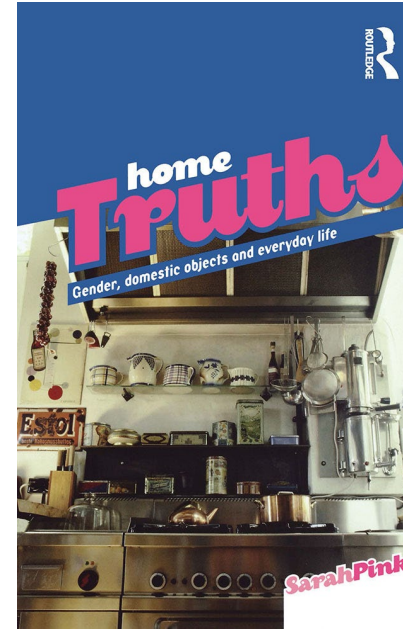
- From August 2019 until February 2020, I conducted ethnographic research in supported housing across the East Midlands, all owned and managed by the largest Housing Association and housing provider in the region, EMH homes.
- The site of research was a women-only supported accommodation, for women who had accessed emergency housing when they were about to be made homeless.
- Just under half the women are mothers and bring their children with them to live in Elizabeth House White British or Pakistani British and were between the ages of 18-55.





# Theory

- Austerity as ‘more-than-fiscal’ sociocultural phenomenon.
- Looking at feminist theories of everyday life, concentrating on the mundane, everyday routines, and domestic work.
- Theories of homemaking – consumer patterns, domestic interiors and identity.



# Method

- From August 2019 until February 2020, I conducted ethnographic research in supported housing across the East Midlands, all owned and managed by the largest Housing Association and housing provider in the region, EMH homes.
- The site of research was a women-only supported accommodation, for women who had accessed emergency housing when they were about to be made homeless.
- Just under half the women are mothers and bring their children with them to live in Elizabeth House White British or Pakistani British and were between the ages of 18-55.

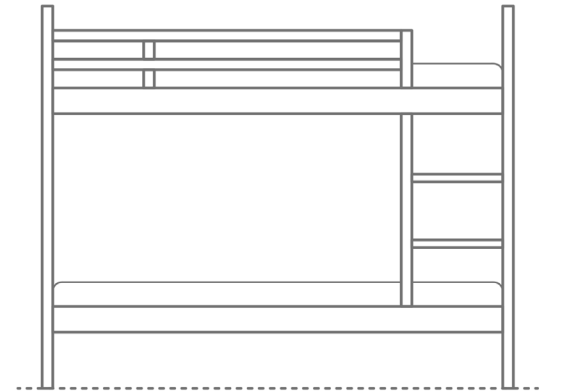
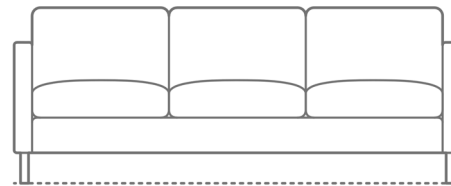
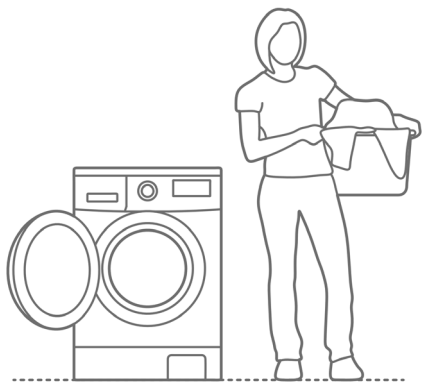




# Findings 1

## Planning For Move On

- The questions include:
  - Does the tenant have furniture?
  - Can they pay the first week's rent?
  - Have they started to collect items needed for independent living?



# Findings 1



‘You used to be able to buy furniture and do decorating with the community care grant. That’s been given over to local furniture projects and the only people that can refer into that is housing officers from the local authority. So that’s when the housing officer will intervene and request two large items from the furniture project. So they will be allowed a cooker, or a bed or a sofa.’

‘what have you done to help you with a house in the future? Have you got yourself a microwave? What little bits have you done to help yourself when you move into a house?’

Jane, Housing Manager

# Findings 1



- Poverty has often been framed as a crisis of overconsumption, and as a failure of the individual to exercise frugality and resourcefulness.
- 'Austerity is also a term to describe a condition of severe simplicity and self-restraint' (Hall, p.2 , 2019).
- 'Thriftiness' is often mobilised as a way of encouraging personal responsibility and self-sufficiency.

## Findings 2

‘I go out to the charity shops and see what’s there, and what I can pick up for cheap. I don’t mind going really because it’s a trip out, and I like seeing what I can get for my money. The thing I really will need is a bed, so I’m hoping to get that through the council. So far, I’ve got a few kitchen bits which I got through church donations, and then I bought some cutlery, and some plates that were on sale’.

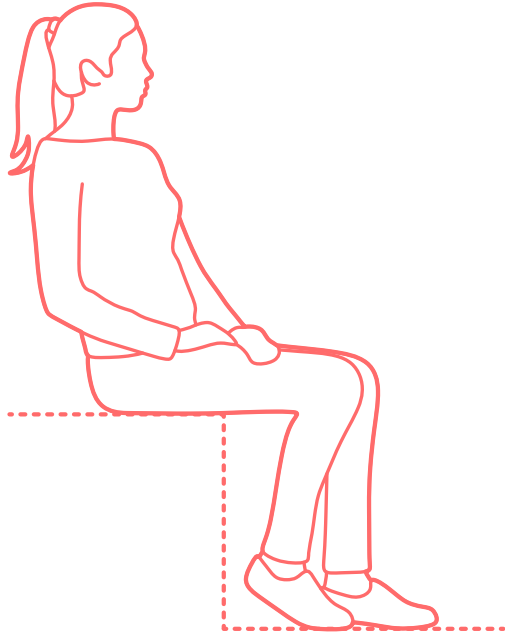
‘I think it’s important that I start getting things ready. I want to be able to cook my kids’ proper meals and be in our own flat together, so I do need to get some more things. I think the council needs to know that we are serious about paying rent on time, and I have to show that I have everything I need to look after my kids. I really need to move out of here because it’s two buses away to see them now – they are living with their grandma’.

‘I am happy here but I know we need to move at some point. We feel safe and there is room here for Evie to play. I feel worried about moving on somewhere else and being on our own. I find all these forms very difficult and Jane helps me out. I need to start getting things together to show her but sometimes I find it difficult to look online and go out shopping’

Tenant



## Findings 2



'I don't know really; I hadn't thought about it. Yes, I guess they are nice'.

'Yes, I was really happy to get this bedding for my son because he will really like it. I want him to feel good living with me. My other son prefers it as his grandma's'

'Yes, sure. I think they will do the job'.

'Sometimes I do see different sorts of houses, you know on the tv, but I don't ever think about making a home look like that'

Tenant



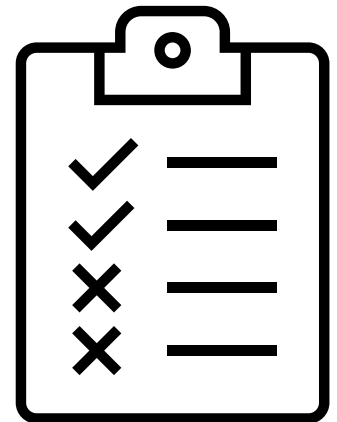
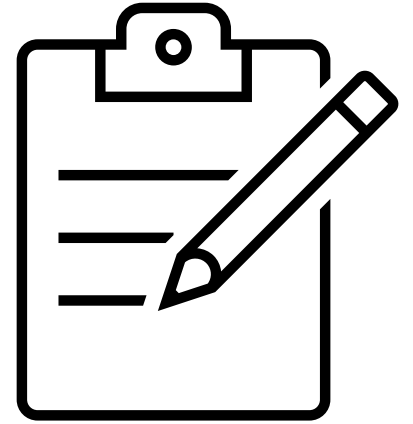
## Findings 2

- The act of material preparation is *prescribed* by the local authority as an extension of moral workfare that has come to dominate local state practices in recent years.
- I found residents unattached to the aesthetics qualities of the objects, only expressing an interest in aesthetics when speaking about items for their children (*'I think she will like it'*), and often within the context of 'showing they could look after their children'
- Residents worried about proving their legitimacy as an independent tenant and a good mother: *'I have to show that I have everything I need to look after my kids'* and purchased objects in order to show *'readiness'*.



# Conclusion

- The first is that austerity is continuing to shape local governance practices, which are then felt on a personal level.
- This is taking the form of new additions to conditionality assessments, which are being presented as a form of 'commonsense' or within a moral framework of financial austerity.
- This form of conditionality is bureaucratised – rather than a conditional 'agreement' based on ideas and rules, people are assessed, and this assessment is written down and filed in the local housing authority.



# Conclusion

- conditionality practices influenced personal consumer practices
- Conditionality requirements prescribed homemaking for prospective social housing tenants – surveilling their purchases
- Women self-surveilled – worried about how they were being perceived as a homemaker and ‘good mother’.

