

Poverty Porn and the Broken Society

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Once again, people experiencing poverty are represented as among the key ‘problem’ groups in the UK. Nothing new there – since the mid to late nineteenth century, with relatively few contrary periods in between, people in poverty have been held up as in some way culpable in their own predicament. So what makes our current period of particular significance? In this paper we explore some of the ways in which poverty is being constructed and people in poverty represented. From the outset we want to locate this within the context of the deep and far reaching assault on public services, social welfare, and on the most disadvantaged groups in society that have recently been unleashed by the Conservative/ Liberal Democrat UK coalition government, accelerating and deepening the 13 years of New Labour attacks which set the stage for this current onslaught.

We are living in the deepest recession and economic crisis since the 1930s, yet for successive governments and for large sections of the media there is another crisis, one characterised as key to the economic ills which grip much of UK society today – as the title of a November 2001 Labour conference had it – ‘Malingering and Illness Deception’¹. Underpinning this political discourse is an even more explicitly US-style workfare model, framing ‘the problem’ as one of the individual behaviour of the least powerful, those living in poverty.

This political approach is accompanied by a pervasive media assault on people experiencing poverty – including some of the most disadvantaged groups. The assault comes in a number of formats: A 24/7 news media, both print and television, that seizes on any example of ‘dysfunctionality’ in poor working class communities – which works to both construct and reinforce dominant attitudes to poverty and welfare more generally, while at the same time expressing largely middle class fears and senses of distrust of ‘the poor’. These then serve to harden attitudes to poverty and to justify harsher welfare policies. Alongside these, a range of television documentaries, reality TV shows, and the like, which also allow ‘experts’ to adjudicate on the faults of working class and disadvantaged lifestyles, emphasising the need for self-improvements and self-help². Concurrently, other programmes offer millionaire philanthropists the opportunity to dispense their largess, or very small parts of it, to a range of causes and cases deemed worthy of such.

TV programmes such as *Jeremy Kyle*, *Tricia*, *Secret Millionaire*, *Saints and Scroungers* are among the most notable of a seemingly growing list that fit in what is now increasingly being referred to as the ‘poverty porn’ genre³. There is a long history of such sermonizing exposure in the UK, echoed in nineteenth century travelogues among the urban poor, narratives of ‘hidden Britain’, print and photographic images of urban squalor, and, increasingly, poverty porn is being played out on the web where anything goes in terms of representations of ‘the poor’. The messages given are pervasive; reflecting and forging an anti-welfarism that fits neatly with state agendas for welfare ‘reform’ and ‘austerity policies’ and legitimates them. Together then, with the expressions of middle class fears and distrust, there is also a fascination with poverty and the supposedly deviant lifestyles of those affected – where viewers of moral outrage are encouraged to find the worst and weakest moments of people’s lives also funny and entertaining. This is offered up for consumption on a wider cross-class

basis – yet it is clear that it reflects middle class antipathies and angst while at the same time delineating in working class communities who the ‘real’ poor are that need to be controlled. In this respect it plays to wider government- and media-generated narratives about ‘scroungers’ and the ‘undeserving’.

The pornography of it all is especially clear when crimes and anti-social behaviour are involved. However, we also need to recognise that such ‘porn’ is not always read or interpreted in the same way, witness the debate and furore around BBC Scotland’s *The Scheme* broadcast in mid 2010.

Welfare in Crisis?

Central to our understanding of the contemporary valorisations of ‘the poor’ as ‘problem population’ are a series of anti-welfare narratives and ideologies which are working not only to construct people in poverty as ‘other’,⁴ but which operate in different ways to harden public attitudes to poverty and to those experiencing it, as well as paving the way for much tougher and punitive welfare policies⁵. Hardly a week goes by without some media story which purports to depict some episode or crisis around social welfare in some form or another. Indeed, writing this in early December 2010, the front-page headline in *The Sun* (the most widely read tabloid in Britain) boldly announces: ‘Iain Duncan Smith on benefits Britain’. The article slated:

“Britain’s shirkers’ paradise shame with hordes of work shy benefit claimants was blamed last night for much of our economic mess. Paying a fortune to the five million on handouts is a major reason the UK’s deficit soared to a crippling £155 billion, Tory minister Iain Duncan Smith told *The Sun*. The Work and Pensions Secretary vowed to press on with the challenge of ending the benefits culture – which he called a deep embarrassment for a country once known as the workshop of the world. *He said: “We have to get Britain to rediscover what was great about this country – the culture of work.”*”⁶

Immediately, Duncan Smith was again shown to be playing fast and loose with statistics, in particular his claims that out-of-work benefits are “a huge part of the reason” for Britain’s deficit. The numbers are lower than in 1997 and the cost increase since the start of the current recession has been due to rising unemployment⁷ – to the point of the UK Statistics Authority rebuking the Welfare minister over ‘serious deficiencies’ in data use.⁸

This is about the coalition reconceptualising the language of ‘fairness’⁹ in the context of a deep economic crisis as means to savage welfare and public services: ‘Is it fair that we the hard workers, we the middle classes, we who are striving to do well for ourselves and our families have to bear the brunt of the recession?’ It is also a story of social welfare in crisis. Such narratives stretch beyond stories of ‘benefits shirkers’ to daily reports about hospital waiting lists, inefficient public sector bureaucracies, through to declining standards of service delivery or the monitoring of such delivery. But over and above these everyday accounts there are a larger set of anxieties around social welfare which focus on particular incidents and episodes as representative of more fundamental problems with social welfare. Three examples serve to illustrate this point:

In 2007 the death of Baby P in London and the subsequent enquiry and trial (of her mother and her partner) in 2009 highlighted like few other cases the absolute horror of violence against and harm of a child within the private spaces



of families. This is a story of a failure in welfare services, put firmly at the door of social workers.¹⁰ There is little that the right wing media like more than being able to pinpoint the blame for failing public services at the door of apparently failing public sector workers, irrespective of any evidence to the contrary. That child protection systems broke down here or were insufficiently rigorous in the first place is seen as emblematic of much more fundamental problems with social welfare.

The second incident which we highlight concerned the conviction of the so-called Edlington Boys, who were convicted for torturing younger children in Doncaster, South Yorkshire, in 2009. Once more this is set in the context of arguments about the failure of welfare protection and again, as with Baby P, around stories of dysfunctional family life, cultures and lifestyles that are problematic or deviant in some form or another.

However, there are other more potent ideologies

at work that underpin, pervade and give potency to the range of anti-welfare stories that are in circulation today. These are characterised by a clear anti-welfare message that draws upon the long standing ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor distinction which today is couched in a language that talks of aspirational deficits and dysfunctional behaviours, an absence of social capital and a seemingly expanding range of moral and behavioural problems. This is illustrated by the Karen Matthews case which relates to other apparent crises of social welfare. The conviction of Matthews and her partner for the kidnapping of her nine year old daughter in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire in 2008, provoked a the kind of backlash that had many of the features of a right-wing moral panic. Speaking after their sentencing in December 2008, Conservative leader David Cameron stated that:

“The verdict last week on Karen Matthews and her vile accomplice is also a verdict on our broken society. The details are damning. A fragmented family held together by drink, drugs and deception. An estate where decency fights a losing battle against degradation and despair. A community whose pillars are crime, unemployment and addiction. How can Gordon Brown argue that people who talk about a broken society are wrong? These children suffered at the very sharpest end of our broken society but all over the country are other young victims, too. Children whose toys are dad’s discarded drink bottles; whose role models are criminals, liars and layabouts; whose innocence is lost before their first milk tooth. What chance for these children? Raised without manners, morals or a decent education, they’re caught up in the same destructive chain as their parents. It’s a chain that links unemployment, family breakdown, debt, drugs and crime.”¹¹

Poverty, Moral Breakdown and Criminality

Cameron’s above quote both reflects wider discourses around, and re-asserts the alleged relationship between poverty, immorality, and crime. The principle targets of such assertions are the working-class poor including those in receipt of welfare benefits. Against the wealth of social scientific and criminological research that refutes common-sense claims that crime is more prevalent and destructive among these groups, it remains the case in popular discourse that people in poverty are assumed to be more immoral and criminally-inclined than their wealthy counterparts, and that often such assumptions are gendered, racist as well as classed. These are particularly potent in the context of contemporary anti-welfarism and both inform and are reproduced in media portrayals of disadvantaged social groups and places.

The ‘problem’ of poor families and communities is told and retold in the print and broadcast media as wreaking havoc on those directly affected but also on wealth and security of the ‘law-abiding majority’. Notions of a ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor and assumptions about the trouble the latter create are deeply rooted in social policies and popular culture historically. They have, however, been given renewed currency in the contemporary period in the wake of the worldwide financial crisis in 2008 and, in particular, in the response of governments to this crisis: the justification for spending cuts. Media coverage both follows and shapes official discourses; exaggerated stories and extreme examples used by newspapers are employed uncritically in official pronouncements to justify the claims being made.

Broken Britain and the Dysfunctional Poor

Under both New Labour and now with the Tory-led UK coalition government, there has been a revitalised assault on those living in poverty and in particular those in receipt of welfare. In recent years there has been an escalation of what amounts to little more than moralistic

scapegoating. There is a renewed political appetite for the condemnation of ‘poor’ places and people. The labels the ‘Broken Society’ and ‘Broken Britain’ have entered wider popular and media discourses to describe the social and moral health of society, and they feature with increasing regularity across a range of stories about public provision and future of welfare. As with many other anti-welfare narratives over recent decades, part of the potency and pervasiveness of the ‘Broken Society’ is that it is a plastic term, able to be deployed without evidence as an explanation for a hugely diverse assortment of social problems. For Conservatives such as Iain Duncan Smith and the Tory Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) there is an explicit argument that the broken and falling apart society has its roots in ‘broken families’ – teenage pregnancies, increasing numbers of one parent households living in a ‘dependency culture’, feature prominently in such perspectives. The CSJ identifies five poverty ‘drivers’: family breakdown, welfare dependency, educational failure, addiction to drugs and alcohol, and serious personal debt. Stable marriages, authoritative parenting, and a two-parent family life are pinpointed as central to ‘mending’ ‘Broken Britain’, thereby reducing levels of poverty. But for consecutive governments the primary route out of poverty has been propounded as through work. The barriers to employment, however, are regarded as matters of ‘habit’ and ‘culture’ and the unwillingness to be ‘flexible’ and ‘mobile’. There is no recognition of the structural nature of unemployment and long-term economic disinvestment.

‘Broken Britain’ is also portrayed in a ‘broken’ Scotland, or, more correctly, the identification of particular parts of Scotland as symbolic of such. Politicians have painted the stage set of sizeable elements of Scottish society as ‘broken’ and cast ‘Shettleston Man’ – a stereotypical workshy folk devil – as the perpetrator:

“This individual has low life expectancy. He lives in social housing, drug and alcohol abuse play an important part in his life and he is always out of work. His white blood cell count killing him directly as a result of his lifestyle and its lack of purpose.”¹²

A key moment in this new mythology was the 2008 Glasgow East by-election¹³. The hotly contested Westminster seat, previously a Labour stronghold, attracted much attention for the power struggles between New Labour – Gordon Brown – and the SNP – Scotland’s First Minister Alex Salmond. However, it wasn’t just the political battle that attracted the spotlight as politicians and the media brought the people of Glasgow East themselves to centre stage for public judgement. The presentation of Glasgow East was overwhelmingly negative, giving voice to a type of thinking that has long featured prominently in the reporting of poverty in disadvantaged urban areas across the UK, in constructing particular locales as ‘problem’ places and ‘welfare ghettos’¹⁴. Dramatic newspaper headlines focussed on premature death rates and persistently high and long-term unemployment. The new language of ‘worklessness’ became commonplace as an oversimplification of welfare receipt – use of the term ‘worklessness’ is stigmatising, pays no regard to unpaid labour, and is particularly pernicious as it implies that the ‘lacking’ is on the part of the individual rather than the labour market which is unwilling or unable to provide consistent, decent employment.

Such representations offered inadequate acknowledgement of how the East End of Glasgow suffered long-term economic decline and disinvestment in the second half of the twentieth century, following the dismantling of much of Scotland’s heavy and manufacturing industries. Journalists were quick to comment on other ‘problems’ in the area. In the *Independent* one commentator spoke of the ‘desolation’ of Easterhouse, and of ‘broken families’, that this is a ‘broken society’¹⁵. Glasgow East was viewed as a place of *misery*, of *apathy* and *despair* (read



‘demoralisation’ or moral inadequacy), a place containing ‘wasted highlands’¹⁶. *The Times* journalist Melanie Reid, while perhaps using the most headline-grabbing language referred to the council estates of the East End as ‘Glasgow’s Guantanamo’.¹⁷

Media and political commentary acts to influence and shape each other, and visits to the Glasgow East constituency by David Cameron and Iain Duncan Smith played a key role in shaping much of the social commentary of the media during the election. Duncan Smith had visited the area in February 2008 to launch a Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) report, ‘Breakthrough Glasgow’, detailing what he identified as the key problems afflicting the area. Using a language that was soon to be the staple of many of the newspaper reports of the election, Glasgow East was held up to represent the ‘Broken Society’.

Welfare Dependency and Estate Cultures

Across much of this commentary, welfare provision is identified as the factor underpinning a range of social ills:

“For too long, people have been allowed to languish, trapped in a dependency culture that held low expectations of those living there and made no demands of them either. You only need to look at the social housing system that successive governments have pursued to realise why, on so many of these

estates, lone parenting, worklessness, failed education and addiction are an acceptable way of life. Over the years we have put all the most broken families, with myriad problems, on the same estates. Too few of the children ever see a good role model: for the dysfunctional family life is the norm.

Worse still, visiting vast Estates like Easterhouse... you realise that incentives to remain dependent far outweigh anything else....

To rectify this we need to accept that the welfare system has become part of this breakdown, giving perverse incentives to too many people. It needs to be changed. It needs to have a simple purpose: to move people from dependence to independence....

At the heart of this lies work. The system must help people to not only find work but also to remain in work, to get the 'work habit'.¹⁸

To foster the 'work habit' and 'incentivise' work the coalition government will, for example, require unpaid work (Mandatory Work Activity) for a specified period from those deemed to be the most intransigent claimants. Financial sanctions amounting to 100% withdrawal of benefits for a specified period will be imposed for those who fail to comply with the new conditionality regime.¹⁹ Furthermore, the Emergency Budget on 22nd June had already announced wide ranging changes to Housing Benefit and Housing Living Allowance (private sector) "to ensure that people on benefit are not living in accommodation that would be out of the reach of most people in work, creating a fairer system for low-income working families and for the taxpayer"²⁰. As this justification indicates, 'fairness' no longer refers to a notion of 'redistribution'. Rather, 'fairness' is bound up with how it is imagined by 'most people in work' and 'the taxpayer' (although many who claim housing and related benefits are in work). The coalition government is reported to have set up a 'Nudge Unit' – formally known as a 'Behavioural Insight Team' – whose first task is to address 'obesity, diet and alcohol'. Behavioural Economics, 'operant conditioning', marks the return of a psychological theory that rose up in the mid-20th century, called Behaviourism. It is based on the view "that individuals can be persuaded – 'nudged' – into making better choices for themselves without force or regulation".²¹ The coalition agreement talks about "finding intelligent ways to encourage people to make better choices for themselves"²². The proponent of this approach, David Halpern, a behavioural economics expert, will also play a role in David Cameron's 'Big Society' project.

Our contention is that the behaviourist educational function made explicit in the 'Nudge Unit' is operating in many registers, including through policy programmes, forms of expertise, and through the state's influence on the mass media and other 'cultural systems'²³. The ways working-class families and communities are portrayed in the mass media in general, and 'poverty porn' in particular, can be read as part of this same educative process. The 'normality' of middle-class lives are contrasted with dysfunctional working-class families; 'backward looking' attitudes among the poor are rendered shameful and middle-class values associated with self-improvement and aspiration are revered in the messages conveyed.

From the Problem Estate to The Scheme

Another example of how poverty in contemporary Scotland is portrayed is provided by the four-part BBC reality television programme *The Scheme*, the first two parts of which were broadcast in May 2010. In this example the community of a deprived housing scheme, Onthank in Kilmarnock, was presented as entertainment for public consumption. The series provoked a great deal of debate and controversy across Scotland and beyond, reflected in considerable press coverage and presence on social networking sites and

online discussion forums. *The Scheme* purported to offer a warts 'n' all 'reality-based' documentary account of life in this particular housing scheme, although only a handful of households were the focus of the programme. It positioned the viewer in judgement over the behaviour and lifestyles of those exhibited.²⁴ In showcasing the problematic or dysfunctional aspects of family relationships, unemployment, alcohol or drug taking, and violence, without insight into the underlying causes (such as the devastating economic change in this part of East Ayrshire) or contexts (of widening social inequalities) of social problems, programme makers created a modern day equivalent of the carnival 'freak show'.

One of the most forceful criticisms of *The Scheme* – and 'poverty porn' more generally – is that it provides a view of poverty and people experiencing poverty out of context; it offered a vision, and a very partial and flawed understanding of poverty which did not consider the underlying social and economic factors that work to generate and reproduce poverty over time. Instead, the focus was on one housing scheme, and on a few particular individuals and families within it, in isolation from the wider issues around poverty, disadvantage, and inequality across Scotland and the UK today. In this respect *The Scheme*, which is perhaps currently the best known programme of its kind, relied upon a largely cultural and behaviour-centred perspective, focused on the individual and family and on the generation of specific cultural and behavioural norms, lifestyles, which work to keep people in poverty.

There is an increasing interest among poverty researchers in what is now being referred to as 'poverty porn' of which *The Scheme* represents one particular format. This refers to the offering up of poverty and of 'poor people' for public entertainment. While some of this is played out on the web and in social networking sites, as well as in the popular press, more significant and potent is the ways in which the televisual media have begun to see in poverty – and its associated conditions – a means to cheap, popular, and populist entertainment. *Jeremy Kyle* and *Tricia* represent one end of this spectrum – and perhaps some of the best known examples of TV-based poverty porn. The question of who the audiences are for such programmes is a pertinent one. Advertisers have no compulsion in lining-up to be associated with these programmes in some shape or form. The advertisers and sponsors of ITV1's flagship daytime programme, attracting over one million viewers daily, *Jeremy Kyle*, clearly have a particular audience segment in mind. Arguably, some of the organisations keen to be linked to the series may be surprising – at least on one level. While Learndirect²⁵ ceased its sponsorship in 2007, following a District Judge in England's description of the show as "a human form of bear baiting",²⁶ the Department for Work and Pensions apparently considered the utility of using the programme format to target those out of work.²⁷

The programme formats of *Jeremy Kyle* and *Tricia* are supplemented by a whole host of 'make-over' and 'self-improvement' shows, as well as other programmes which offer the wealthy a chance to express their benefactor role or philanthropy by dispensing money to good causes (*Secret Millionaire*) and the like, or to live among poor people to 'experience what poverty is really like' (*How the Other Half Live*).

Being nudged in the right direction?

That Learndirect's sponsorship was withdrawn suggests that there is some degree of contestation and ambiguity around the messages that Kyle's show carries. Together with the other poverty porn formats highlighted here, it does however illustrate the importance of media discourse in the constructing particular groups as 'problem', as well as contributing to tutelage for those deemed in need of such – part of a burgeoning skills/



confidence/ 'wellbeing' market under New Labour, evidenced by the likes of 'parenting qualifications'. In turn, the messages that we as viewers receive are that, for the most part, working-class people lack aspiration, are lazy, waste national resources and tax-payers' money – an especially heinous crime when there is an economic crisis and when the middle classes are doing their bit, losing out on child benefit, for instance; they do not have the character to lead a morally upright and crime-free life and lack the wherewithal to improve their condition without being 'nudged' in the right direction. But we are also asked to concur on who is designated 'deserving' or not. The BBC TV series *Saints and Scroungers* (in 2009) is one such programme centred on the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. As its web pages inform us: "Dominic Littlewood follows fraud officers as they bust the benefits thieves stealing millions of pounds every year, while charities and councils track down people who actually deserve government help". The programme reminds us that 'we' law abiding taxpayers are being 'robbed' by the 'scroungers'; we acquire the impression that it is easy to obtain welfare benefits (as evidenced by supposed prevalence of 'scroungers' – whereas in 2008/09 £12.7bn of means-tested benefits and £5bn of tax credits went unclaimed²⁸).

The cameras pay attention to the possessions of those experiencing severe poverty (on *The Scheme* for example) and through the camera's gaze on the plasma TVs and other goods, use of alcohol and tobacco we learn that many of those in poverty are 'flawed consumers'²⁹ and that, as these are 'non-essentials', the benefits which claimants receive must be 'too much'. Once more the question of the 'fairness of it all' is raised, albeit implicitly or by suggestion. In the absence of understanding any further context, the viewer responds with moral indignation and disgust; the 'binary divide' between 'us' and 'them' is reinforced³⁰. In the context of increasing economic

and social insecurity, flawed consumption and this seemingly pathological behaviour mobilises support for a harsher and more punitive welfarism. Furthermore, these messages also work as a warning – inculcating fear that personal ‘failure’ will lead to the flawed and deviant lifestyle of ‘the poor’.

Poverty porn fits with and contributes to the political and cultural zeitgeist. In so doing it constrains creative film-makers who wish to work outside conventional ‘journalistic rules of relevancy’³¹, but, moreover, it provides fascination and nurtures revulsion among the viewing public and provides a focus for who is to be ‘blamed’ for our ‘broken society’. Poverty porn provides, or helps to provide, the justification for the ‘remaking’ of welfare along US-style ‘workfare’ models. It fits with the common-place anti-welfarism in the tabloid press. In August 2010, *The Sun*, for example, ran the headline that ‘Cam’s [Cameron’s] a £5bn Scambuster’. While it is true that some informed commentators in the broadsheet newspapers and on social media quickly pointed out the headline figure of £5bn was misleading – it includes ‘fraud and error’³² and that fraud in benefits and tax credits combined accounted for the much lower sum of £1.5bn – *The Sun* was building on ground that had already been well laid; that benefits claimants were ‘takers’, not ‘givers’, and that ‘something needs to be done’.

It is important to emphasise that there is resistance to the dominant way people experiencing poverty are represented; there are important challenges to the re-conceptualisation of ‘fairness’ we have described above, and there is support for re-distributive measures as well as critiques of the way many disadvantaged groups are demonized and criminalised. There are examples too numerous to mention of resistance to the way working-class lives and communities are constructed and portrayed in the media, as well as mobilisation against government proposals and policies and the broader ideological framework in which they reside. Acts of resistance remain too frequently met by counter-methods including messages that protesters are behaving in ways that are unreasonable and extreme, but these struggles nevertheless illustrate that ‘poverty porn’ and dominant constructions of the ‘Broken Society’ and its core messages are not totalising or all encompassing; rather, they reflect the operation of power.

Not surprisingly, a host of interrelated tensions and contradictions are thrown-up here: consumer growth and consumption is heralded as key to national economic salvation, and individual consumption as a sign of having achieved the normative consumer-worker-citizen status, a sign of success. Yet at the same time such uncontrolled urges, at least on the part of the most disadvantaged, signal personal weakness; a failure to plan for a future that might never be attained, to save for a retirement that is being pushed further and further away, to save and support a child’s education which beyond school is increasingly being put out of reach. It is also seen as corrupting of civility, of social and civic responsibility, of encouraging instant gratification rather than other forms of reward – ‘Why constantly strive to consume when we can play a part in the ‘Big Society’, as opposed to the ‘Broken Society’, gaining in other ways from doing our bit for community and society?’

Another significant contradiction is apparent here, one which is increasingly being put into stark terms: aspiration has become one of the most valorised government and policy making terms of recent times. It is seemingly innocuous – who, apart from the most disreputable among ‘the poor’ could be anything but aspirational? This is all underpinned by a neoliberal agenda that promotes individualism and individual self-help, but that which we are encouraged to aspire to is increasingly and sharply colliding with the lived realities of more and more people’s lives across the UK today – and this extends too into

the heartlands of the so-called middle classes too. The ‘normality’ of middle class lives represent an aspirational construct, a device by which to divide ‘us’ from ‘them’, to delineate those who are not like us, but an us who are increasingly also unlike the ‘us’ who are held up as a beacon for others to aspire³³.

In conclusion, the broader narratives of ‘Broken Britain’ with its underpinning allusion to family and community dysfunction is punctuated with heightened anxiety around particular episodes and cases that are accorded so much prominence in the print and broadcast media. In this manner, and in different ways, the Baby P, Edlington Boys, and the Karen Matthews cases (among many others) are regarded as emblematic of welfare failure. Poverty porn in its various formats, with its focus on individual and community failure and wholly de-contextualised from a critical understanding of the broader historical and structural processes that shape working class lives and life chances, reinforce and reproduce the logic of neo-liberal, punitive workfare policies – and, concomitantly, the multi-sectoral restructuring of social welfare policy and social work practices along market principles. The attention accorded to ‘aspirational’ deficits and what are deemed as problematic consumption patterns draws a veil over the contradictions that may be revealed on closer scrutiny. Once more we find ourselves amidst a war on the poor, not on the economic, structural causes of poverty.

Notes

- 1 A reference to William Hogarth’s 1747 engravings ‘Industry and Idleness’ to illustrate to working children the rewards of hard work and the sure disasters otherwise?
- 2 See Bev Skeggs ‘The making of class and gender through visualising moral subject formation’, *Sociology*, 39, 5, 2005 pp965-982
- 3 Pat Kane ‘It’s not about people or poverty. *The Scheme* is quite simply porn’, *The Herald* June 1st 2010; Barbara Ellen, ‘Please give generously, but not to Poverty TV’, *The Guardian*, May 23rd 2010; Martyn McLaughlin, ‘Brutal eye-opener or ‘poverty porn’? *The Scotsman*, May 28th 2010.
- 4 Ruth Lister, *Poverty*, Oxford: Policy Press 2004.
- 5 Gerry Mooney and Sarah Neal ‘Welfare worries’: mapping the directions of welfare futures in the contemporary UK’, *Research, Policy and Planning*, 27, 3, 2009/10, pp. 141-150
- 6 *The Sun*, December 1st 2010
- 7 *Left Foot Forward*, December 1 2010 – <http://www.leftfootforward.org/2010/12/ids-misleads-the-sun-on-out-of-work-benefits/>
- 8 ‘Welfare ministers rebuked over “serious deficiencies” in data use’, *The Guardian*, Friday 26 November <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/nov/26/welfare-ministers-serious-deficiencies-data>
- 9 Regrading conceptualisations of equality: as ‘fairness’ becomes the lowest common denominator, Brian Barry has stressed equality is of not much value on its own and that we should, rather, be talking about social justice.
- 10 See Ian Ferguson and Michael Lavalette (eds) *Social Work After Baby P*, Liverpool Hope University, 2009
- 11 David Cameron, *Daily Mail*, December 8th 2008
- 12 Ian Duncan Smith ‘Why talk alone will never end the misery I saw in Glasgow East’, *Mail on Sunday*, July 13th 2008.
- 13 Gerry Mooney ‘The ‘Broken Society’ Election: Class Hatred and the Politics of Poverty and Place in Glasgow East’, *Social Policy and Society*, 8, 4, 2009: pp.437-450.
- 14 ‘Damned lies and statistics’, Media Interview, Fraser Nelson, *Sunday Herald*, July 5th 2009
- 15 John Rentoul ‘The Prime Minister’s nightmare scenario’, *The Independent*, July 13th 2008.
- 16 Melanie Reid ‘Labour’s Glasgow fortress may succumb to apathy’, *The Times*, July 8th 2008.
- 17 Melanie Reid ‘A political timebomb in Glasgow’s Guantanamo’, *The Times*, July 3rd 2008.
- 18 Ian Duncan Smith ‘Living and dying on welfare in Glasgow East’, *Daily Telegraph*, July 13th 2008.
- 19 Department for Work and Pensions (2010) ‘Universal Credit: Welfare that Works’, Cm 7957 London: Department for work and Pensions. <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/universal-credit-full-document.pdf>
- 20 Department for Work and Pensions (2010) ‘Impact of changes to Local Housing Allowance from 2011’, London: Department for Work and Pensions. [http://www.dwp.gov.uk/local-authority-staff/housing-benefit/claims-](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/local-authority-staff/housing-benefit/claims-processing/local-housing-allowance/impact-of-changes.shtml#rc)

[processing/local-housing-allowance/impact-of-changes.shtml#rc](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/local-authority-staff/housing-benefit/claims-processing/local-housing-allowance/impact-of-changes.shtml#rc)

- 21 Lawrence, Felicity ‘The first goal of David Cameron’s ‘nudge unit’ is to encourage healthy living’, *The Guardian*, 12th November 2010 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/nov/12/david-cameron-nudge-unit>
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Hall, S., Critcher, C., Jefferson, T., Clarke, J. and Roberts, B. (1978) *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- 24 Libby Brooks ‘Exotic, extreme, engrossing – tune in to channel poverty’, *The Guardian*, May 27th 2010.
- 25 Ufi, which operates the *learnndirect* brand (covering a range of inter-related services for online learning, advice and guidance) also operates a commercial company and runs the *UK Online Centres* network of community internet access points.
- 26 ‘Did you see?’, *Marketing Week*, Vol30, No40, April 10 2007.
- 27 ‘Government and ITV consider joint *Jeremy Kyle* series’, *The Telegraph*, September 7 2008; *Personnel Today*, September 8th 2008.
- 28 ‘Britain’s unclaimed benefit billions’, *The Guardian*, Friday 10th September 2010 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/sep/10/britains-unclaimed-benefit-billions> Also see: http://www.cpag.org.uk/cro/wrb/wrb181/DLA_cancer.htm
- 29 Zygmunt Bauman *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, Buckingham: Open University Press, 2004.
- 30 See: Jock Young *The Vertigo of Late Modernity*, London, Sage, 2007
- 31 Chibnall, S. (1977) *Law and Order News: An analysis of Crime Reporting in the British Press*. London: Tavistock.
- 32 A guide to what overpayments may now be defined as fraud was rewritten again in September 2010 - part of a system so complex “HM Revenues and Customs (HMRC) have begun a tax reconciliation exercise to contact around six million people to tell them that they have either under or over paid tax for 2008/2009 and/or 2009/2010.” <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/g15-2010.pdf>
- 33 See: Jock Young, *The Vertigo of Late Modernity*, London: Sage, 2007