The Routledge Handbook of Critical Social Work

Edited by Stephen A. Webb

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The Routledge Handbook of Critical Social Work brings together the world's leading scholars in the field to provide a cutting-edge overview of classic and current research and future trends in the subject.

Comprised of 48 chapters divided into six parts:

- Historical, social, and political influences
- Mapping the theoretical and conceptual terrain
- Methods of engagement and modes of analysis
- Critical contexts for practice and policy
- Professional education and socialisation
- Future challenges, directions, and transformations

it provides an authoritative guide to theory and method, and the primary debates of today in social work from a critical perspective.

This handbook is a major reference work and the first book to comprehensively map the wide-ranging territory of critical social work. It does so by addressing its conceptual developments, its methodological advances, its value-based front-line practice and as an influence on the policy field. By offering a definitive survey of current academic knowledge as it relates to professional practice, it provides the first comprehensive, up-to-date, definitive work of reference in critical social work while at the same time identifying emerging, innovative and cutting-edge areas.

Stephen A. Webb is Professor of Social Work at Glasgow Caledonian University. His research interests focus on social work and social theory, with a focus on ethics, power, politics and community. His article on evidence-based practice published in the *British Journal of Social Work* was the world's most cited article and the most influential publication in social work over ten years (Hodge et al., 2011). He is a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences.

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This book is dedicated to my wife Penelope, to our companion species friends Hegel and Kore, and to my parents Mary and Philip Webb.

Contents

Contents

Contents

Contributors

Editor

Stephen A. Webb is Professor of Social Work at Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland. Prior to this he was Professor of Human Sciences and Director of the Research Institute for Social Inclusion and Well-being, University of Newcastle, Australia and Professorial Research Fellow in Social Work at the University of Sussex. He is Visiting Professor at several European universities in Germany, Holland, Poland and Portugal. In 2008 he was awarded the Deutscher Akademisher Austaussch Dienst, (DAAD) Academic Exchange Scheme for a visiting professorship at the Centre of Human Capabilities Research, University of Bielefeld, by the German Federal Government. He has published several books which theorise social work from a political and philosophical standpoint. His article on evidence-based practice published in the *British Journal of Social Work* is the world's most cited article in the field and the most influential publication in social work over the last ten years (Hodge et al., 2011). In 2018 he was awarded the prestigious Fellowship of the Academy of Social Sciences (FAcSS).

Contributors

Brent Angell is Professor Emeritus in the School of Social Work at the University of Windsor, Canada. His scholarly work focuses on redefining critical perspectives related to diversity and community-engaged practice research. Dr Angell collaborates with several Canadian First Nations on research related to education, health, criminal justice, and safety. He is the Editor-in-Chief of the online periodical *Critical Social Work: An Interdisciplinary Journal Dedicated to Social Justice* and provides consultation to a broad constituency on organizational development and institutional leadership. Dr Angell's research and writings critique normative paradigms and practices to advance understanding and generate change.

Mark Baldwin was a Senior Lecturer in Social Work at the University of Bath, UK, and retired in 2015. His research interests focus principally on the part played by front-line practitioners in the construction of policy and practice, mainly in the area of adult services. This interest includes consideration of professional discretion and the concept of the learning organisation as well as the possibilities for social workers to practise from radical perspectives in contemporary social work organisations. He also has an interest in the possibilities for service-users to participate in the construction of their services. His research methodology has been principally participatory action research, mirroring his approach to both teaching and social work practice. Mark is a member of the *Social Work Action Network*, a radical campaigning organisation based in the UK but with links across the globe.

Liz Beddoe is an Associate Professor of Social Work at the University of Auckland in New Zealand. Her research interests include critical perspectives on social work education and supervision; the study and social work professional identity in host settings, and the experiences of migrant social workers. Liz has published widely in international journals and contributions to edited books, addressing diverse professional issues. She has published several books on the practice of professional supervision and several edited texts on social policy, health and social work and transnational social workers. She is editor-in-chief of the open access journal *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work*. She teaches on the discourse of social work and research methods. She is committed to developing positive and creative engagement in social media as a productive space for international social work research and professional development.

Peter Beresford, OBE, is Professor of Citizen Participation at the University of Essex, Co-Chair of *Shaping Our Lives*, the national disabled people's and service users' organisation and network and Emeritus Professor of Social Policy at Brunel University London. He was awarded the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Science by Edge Hill University in 2017 for his work on public participation and user involvement. He is a long-term user of mental health services, lived for eight years on welfare benefits and has a longstanding background of involvement in issues of participation as writer, researcher, activist and teacher. Recent books include *All Our Welfare: Towards Participatory Social Policy* (Policy Press, 2016) and *Social Policy First Hand* (co-edited with Sarah Carr, Policy Press, 2018). He writes regularly in *The Guardian* and he is co-editor of the forthcoming *Madness, Violence and Power: A Radical Anthology* (University of Toronto Press, 2019).

Linda Briskman holds the Margaret Whitlam Chair of Social Work at Western Sydney University. Her research focuses on human rights for Indigenous peoples and asylum seekers, and challenging Islamophobia. As an academic activist, Linda works closely with organisations that advocate for the rights of people made vulnerable through political processes, particularly those subjected to immigration detention. Her most recent book is the co-edited *Social Work in the Shadow of the Law* (Federation Press, 2018). Other books include *Social Work with Indigenous Peoples: A Human Rights Approach* (Federation Press, 2014) and the co-authored award-winning *Human Rights Overboard: Seeking Asylum in Australia* (Scribe, 2008). She is co-convenor of Social Workers Without Borders (www.socialworkerswithoutborders.net)

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journals on topics such as the privatisation, fragmentation and biomedicalisation of social work (*British Journal of Social Work; International Social Work*), de-professionalisation (*Work, Employment and Society; Organization*), and more recently around disability and childhood (*Ethics and Social Welfare; British Journal of Social Work*) and critical interpretations of service user participation (*Ageing and Society; Qualitative Social Work*). He teaches student and qualified social workers adult social work, qualitative research methodology and theory.

Monique Constance-Huggins is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Social Work at Winthrop University, South Carolina, US. Her research interests are in the areas of racial ide-ologies and disparities; social capital and poverty. She has written on 'Critical Race Theory in Social Work Education: A Framework for Addressing Racial Disparities' (*Critical Social Work*, 2012). Her work on critical race theory is also reflected in a co-authored article on 'Critical Race Theory: Opportunities for Application in Social Work Practice' (*Families in Society*, 2014). She has authored and co-authored several other articles on race such as 'Color-blind Racial Attitudes and their Implications for Achieving Race-related Grand Challenges' (2017) and 'Intersection of Race, Gender, and Nationality in Teaching about Race and Racism' (2017). Her main areas of teaching are research methods and policy analysis.

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Viviene E. Cree is Professor of Social Work Studies at the University of Edinburgh. She has conducted research in a number of social work-related fields over the last 20 years, focusing mainly on qualitative research that aims to improve social work services, and hence, the lives of those who use services. Within this, she has specialised in research on social work history, feminism and gender in social work, HIV and children and young people affected by parental illness. Social Work at Edinburgh was 100 years old in 2018 and she chaired a centenary com-mittee to celebrate this. One research project arising out of this work, entitled 'Women in the Academy', is sponsored by the Carnegie UK Trust. Her teaching spans three broad fields: social work, sociology and research skills.

Suzy Croft has worked directly with service users for 26 years as a specialist palliative care social worker. In 1988 she was awarded the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work and a Diploma in Social Studies with distinction from Goldsmith's College. From 1989 to 1993 she worked as a social worker in the Bloomsbury Support Team, a multi-disciplinary team support-ing terminally ill people with cancer and their families in the community. From 1993 to 2016 she worked at St. John's Hospice, London, with people with life-limiting and life-threatening illnesses from an extremely diverse population and set up the children's bereavement service. She was appointed as the Social Work and Bereavement Team Leader in 2000. As a palliative care social worker, she was a member of the Association of Palliative Care Social Workers and served on the Committee of the Association three times, once as Chair and twice as the Service User Involvement Officer. Suzy has published widely on public participation, social work and service user involvement and is a trustee of two leading organisations for palliative care, Help the Hospices and the National Council for Palliative Care, and a member of the Board of the College of Social Work. She is Welfare Rights Officer for AgeUK Norwich.

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Anne C. Deepak is an Associate Professor of Social Work at Monmouth University, West Long Branch, NJ, USA. Her research interests are in the application of a postcolonial feminist social work perspective to global social problems, globalisation and international partnerships, and antiracism and diversity in social work education. She has authored articles on a postcolonial feminist social work perspective on food insecurity (*Affilia*) and transnational and postcolonial feminist perspectives on globalisation, power and resistance (*International Social Work*). Her empirical work is reflected in publications on the use of intimate technology in antiracism social work education (*Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work*), the delivery of diversity and social justice education in social work (*Journal of Progressive Human Services*), and perspectives of Mexican–American social workers on doctoral education and academia (*Journal of Social Work Education*). She was awarded the Feminist Scholarship Award in 2011 by the Women's Council of the Council on Social Work Education for her paper, 'Sustainability and Population Growth in the Context of Globalization: A Postcolonial Feminist Social Work Perspective'. She teaches courses on international and community and human rights and social justice in social work.

Lena Dominelli is Professor of Social Work at Stirling University. She formerly worked at Durham University and was Co-Director at the Institute of Hazards, Risk and Resilience Research. She has led major research projects in disaster interventions with funding from the ESRC, EPSRC, NERC, the Wellcome Trust and DfID. Lena has worked in social services, probation and community development and published widely in social work, social policy and sociology. A recent book, *Green Social Work* (Polity Press, 2012) argues for interdisciplinary, sustainable citizen-based approaches to disasters. She is recognised as a leading figure in social work education globally and was elected President of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) from 1996 to 2004, currently chairs the IASSW Committee on Disaster Interventions, Climate Change and Sustainability and represents the profession at the United Nations (UNFCCC) discussions on climate change. She has received various honours including: Medal in 2002 from the French Senate; an honorary doctorate in 2008 from the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa; Katherine A. Kendall Memorial Award in 2012; and honorary doctorate in 2018 from Malmö University in Sweden.

Natalia Farmer is a Research Associate at Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland. Prior to this, she completed her MA in Social Work at the University of Salford. Her ethnographic research at The Asylum Seeker Housing Project in Glasgow has focused upon the tensions between immigration legislation and social work practice, including the issue of 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF). Her recent publication, *'No Recourse to Public Funds', Insecure Immigration*

Status and Destitution: The Role of Social Work? (2017) is drawn from her PhD research and explores the barriers destitute NRPF families encounter when attempting to access local authority support. She has provided written and oral evidence to the Scottish Governments Equality and Human Rights Committee, which informed the report, 'Hidden Lives − New Beginnings: *Destitution, Asylum and Insecure Immigration Status in Scotland*' (2017). Other research interests include the methodological approach of controversy analysis, a style of inquiry developed in Science and Technology Studies (STS) and related fields. She is currently an editorial board member of Critical and Radical Social Work.

Brigid Featherstone is Professor and Head of Department (Behavioural and Social Sciences) at the University of Huddersfield, UK. She has a background in social work with young offenders and child protection. Her research interests lie in the areas of gender, inequality and child protection policy and practice reform. She was a member of the Child Welfare Inequalities Project team led by Professor Paul Bywaters exploring the relationship between deprivation and child protection interventions. She is the co-author of *Re-imagining Child Protection: Towards Humane Social Work with Families* (2014) and *Protecting Children: A Social Model* (2018) and founding editor of the journal *Families, Relationships and Societies*. She teaches courses on gender and inequality in child protection.

Jane Fenton is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work at the University of Dundee, Scotland. Her research interests concern social work education, particularly the influence of the neoliberal hegemony and the need for critical thinking in the social work profession. Her publications include text books for social work students (*Values in Social Work: Reconnecting with Social Justice* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) and *Social Work for Lazy Radicals* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2019, forthcoming)) and articles for several journals on topics such as professionalism and social work (*Critical and Radical Social Work*), ethical stress in criminal justice social work (*British Journal of Social Work*) neoliberalism and younger social work students (*Social Work Education*) and risk aversion in social work (*Journal of Social Work Practice*). Her teaching includes politics, risk aversion, ethical stress, reflection and ethical practice.

Iain Ferguson worked for many years as a social worker and community worker in the West of Scotland before moving into social work education in the early 1990s. He taught at both Paisley and Stirling Universities and is now Honorary Professor of Social Work and Social Policy at the University of the West of Scotland. He is the author of many articles and several books including *Radical Social Work in Practice* (Policy Press, 2009, with Rona Woodward), *Global Social Work in a Political Contest: Radical Perspectives* (Policy Press, 2018, with Michael Lavalette and Vasilios Ioakimidis), and *Politics of the Mind: Marxism and Mental Distress* (Bookmarks, 2017). He is co-editor of *Critical and Radical Social Work: An International Journal* and is a founder-member of the Social Work Action Network (SWAN) (www.socialworkfuture.org).

Jo Finch is a Reader in Social Work and Deputy Director of the Centre for Social Work Research at the University of East London, UK. Jo is also the Course Director of the Professional Doctorate in Social Work. Her research interests focus on the assessment of social work students in placements, with a focus on struggling or failing students, and has published widely in this field. She is the author of *Supporting Struggling Students on Placement: A Practice Guide* (Policy Press, 2017). Jo has also, with two co-authors, recently published *SHARE: A New Model of Social Work* (Kirwan Maclean Associates, 2018). Jo is also interested in the politics of social work, and with David McKendrick, has published a number of articles on the PREVENT policy

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Liz Frost is Associate Professor of Social Work at the University of the West of England, Bristol, on the Executive Board of the Association for Psychosocial Studies, and co-editor of *The Journal of Psychosocial Studies*. Her research interests mainly address the issue of how human experiences can best be understood through the lens of contemporary psychosocial thinking. Drawing on a tradition from German critical theory, her work concerns the inter-weaving of social structural theory and psychoanalytical thinking to contemporary phenomena, such as shame ('Exploring the concepts of recognition and shame for social work', *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 2016). Liz has extended a psychosocial approach to life course studies, e.g. *Thinking About the Life Course: A Psychosocial Introduction*, co-authored with Stuart McClean (2014, Palgrave/ Macmillan). Currently she is researching intergenerational difference (baby boomers versus millennials) taking a psychosocial perspective, with Steve Hunt (forthcoming, 2018), in 'Age: Divisions, divergencies and discord', in *Social Divisions, 4th edition*, edited by Payne and Harrison, and is editing an international edition on shame and social work, with Alessandro Sicora, Veronika Magyar-Haas and Holger Schoneville, for Policy Press (forthcoming, 2019).

Cynthia J. Gallop is an Associate Professor in the department of Child Studies and Social Work at Mount Royal University, Canada. Her research interests include the influence of critical theory on social work practice, community service-learning and social work, experiences of Indigenous learners, interpretive research, and participatory action research. Cynthia has written for various journals on topics such as the experiences of newly graduated social workers educated in a critical tradition and the experiences of Aboriginal students in higher education. She teaches courses on Canadian social policy, Indigenous perspectives in social work practice and the philosophy of hope.

Fiona Gardner is an Associate Professor and Discipline Lead for Social Work and Social Policy at La Trobe University's Rural Health School in Victoria, Australia and coordinates social work education across four rural campuses. Fiona's research interests have focused on the development of critical reflection and critical spirituality as frameworks for understanding and engaging more deeply with issues in practice and education from a critical theory perspective. She has co-authored several books on critical reflection with Professor Jan Fook including *Practising Critical Reflection* and has chapters related to critical spirituality in several edited collections including *Spirituality in Healthcare* (2012) and *Handbook of Religion, Spirituality and Social Work* (2017). Her most recent books are *Being Critically Reflective* (2014) and *Working with Human Service Organisations* (2016).

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Paul Michael Garrett works at NUI Galway in the Republic of Ireland. However, he completed his two chapters for this volume whilst Visiting Professor at the City University of New York (CUNY) in 2018. Paul has presented keynote papers at international conferences across Europe and in China. For many years, he has been the Editor of Reviews for the Editorial collective of *Critical Social Policy*. He is the author of over a hundred internationally peer-reviewed articles and several books, including his most recent, *Welfare Words: Critical Social Work & Social Policy* (2018). Contemporary neoliberalism and historical practices of marginalisation and domination are some of his main scholarly concerns.

Edward Granter is a Senior Lecturer in Organizational Behaviour at the University of Birmingham, UK. His research interests lie in the intersections of Frankfurt School Critical Theory and the sociology of work and organization. He has written on the future of work (*Critical Social Theory and the End of Work*, Routledge 2009) and the influence of Critical Theory on organization studies. Edward's empirical research on healthcare work and organization is reflected in his co-authorship of *Deconstructing the Welfare State* (Routledge 2016). He is co-editor of *The Sage Handbook of the Sociology of Work and Employment* (2015) and has written for various journals on topics such as the global financial crisis (*Sociology*), corporate crime (*Competition & Change*) and extreme work (*Organization; Work, Employment and Society*). He teaches courses on organizational behaviour, and critical analysis in management.

Stan Houston is a Lecturer in Social Work at Trinity College Dublin. His academic interests lie in the application of critical social theory and philosophy to social work practice. He has focused mainly on European social theorists and philosophers including Habermas, Honneth, Bourdieu, Husserl, Bhaskar and Merleau-Ponty. Many of his theoretical contributions develop practice frameworks for social workers, delving into areas such as reflexivity and ethical reflection. In terms of teaching, Houston has delivered a range of postgraduate modules aimed at practitioners in child and family social work.

Lucas D. Introna is Professor of Organisation, Technology, and Ethics at Lancaster University. His research interest is the entanglement of the social and the technical, especially with regard to the ethics and politics implicated in such entanglements. He is co-editor of *Ethics and Information Technology* and acted as associate editor for *Management Information Systems Quarterly* and *Information Systems Research*. He has published on a variety of topics such as sociomateriality (*Organisation Studies*), algorithms (*Theory, Culture & Society; Science, Technology & Human Values*), governmentality (*Organisation Studies*), ethics (*Theory, Culture & Society*), philosophy of technology (*Philosophy in the Contemporary World*), information and power (*Management, Information & Power*, Palgrave 1997), privacy (*Journal of Business Ethics*) and surveillance (*Surveillance & Society*). He teaches courses in business ethics, reflective practice, and organisational change management.

Vasilios Ioakimidis is the Founding Professor of Social Work and Director of the Centre for Social Work at the University of Essex. He is also the Chair of IFSW's Global Education

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Emily Keddell is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work at the University of Otago, Aotearoa New Zealand. Her research interests cover several aspects of child welfare policy and practice: child protection decision-making, inequalities in child welfare, ethnicity and identities, the construction of parents and children in policy contexts, and the ethical implications of predictive algorithms. Across these areas, she is interested in understanding how forms of knowledge, power and material contexts shape policy and practice, with a keen interest in just outcomes for service users. She is a member of the Re-imagining Social Work Collective, the ANZSW Editorial Collective, and an associate member of Child Poverty Action NZ.

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Michael Lavalette is Professor of Social Work and Social Policy at Liverpool Hope University. He has written widely on various aspects of radical social work and social movement activity. His most recent books include (with Stephen Cunningham) *Schools Out: The Hidden History of School Student Strikes in Britain* (Bookmarks, 2016) and (with Iain Ferguson and Vassilios Ioakimidis) *Global Social Work in Political Context* (Policy Press, 2018). He is Editor in Chief of the journal *Critical and Radical Social Work* and national co-ordinator of the Social Work Action Network (SWAN) in Britain.

Calum Lindsay is a second-year PhD research student at the University of Stirling's Centre for Child Wellbeing and Protection, where he is producing research under the Seamless Services research project. His research project will focus on the issues of service provision to families with insecure or precarious immigration status. His wider research interests relate to issues of migration and its intersections with wider social policy, as well as socio-materialism, ethnographic methodologies and critical approaches to understanding the world. This is his first published chapter, but he has contributed to forthcoming research briefings on child wellbeing at the University of Stirling. He previously qualified with an MSc in Social Work from Glasgow Caledonian University, and this chapter is a condensed and updated version of his MSc dissertation research. He is currently working in the refugee sector in Glasgow.

Heather Lynch is a lecturer in social work at Glasgow Caledonian University UK. Her research interests are in biopolitical theory, philosophy of the environment and visual methods. She has written on the political science of digital storytelling (*Visual Methodologies*, 2017) and the affirmative biopolitics of community. She is currently undertaking a research project with Glasgow's Roma population which explores questions of community and social cohesion. She is co-editor of a forthcoming special edition of the *European Journal of Social Theory* on 'affirmative biopolitics'. She has written for various journals on topics such as ethics in criminal justice (*Ethics and Welfare*), policy and desire (*British Journal of Sociology of Education*) and life transitions (*Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*).

Edgar Marthinsen is Professor of Social Work at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim, Norway. His research interests lie in the history of social work and its relation to the social sciences and politics. His applied research concerns development of research supported knowledge strategies in practice. He has edited and contributed to a range of publications. He is presently co-editing a special issue of EJSW on the impact of neoliberal thinking on social work. He contributed to Harrikari, Rauhala and Vironkannas (2014) *Social Change and Social Work* and co-edited *Practice Research in Nordic Social Work – Knowledge Production in Transition* (2012) with Ilse Julkunen. Marthinsen has a long history of empirical research on social work practice in the field of child protection and workfare practices and has written extensively on practice research in Norway. He teaches currently at NTNU and is Head of Research at the Department of Social Work.

David McKendrick is a Lecturer in Social Work at Glasgow Caledonian University and is the Programme Leader for the undergraduate BA (Hons) programme. David teaches on the MSc programme and is responsible for the supervision of students undertaking post-graduate dissertations. David's research interests focus on the application of sociological and political theories in social work. David has written on a variety of topics but is particularly interested in how social work can be deployed as an instrument of oppression rather than an opportunity to challenge existing political structures and settlements. David has written extensively on the PREVENT policy and its implications for social work policy and practice. Along with co-author, Stephen Webb, David has written on the political nature of social work. David is interested in how the internet and social media can be deployed in social work education and practice.

Christine Morley is Professor of Social Work and the Head of the Social Work and Human Services Disciplines at the Queensland University of Technology, Australia. She is author of *Practising Critical Reflection to Develop Emancipatory Change* (Routledge, 2014) and co-author (with Phillip Ablett and Selma Macfarlane) of *Engaging with Social Work* (2014, 2019). She is lead

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Bob Pease is Adjunct Professor in the Institute for the Study of Social Change at the University of Tasmania and Honorary Professor in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Deakin University, Australia. He has published extensively on masculinity politics and critical social work practice, including four books as single author and fourteen books as co-editor, as well as numerous book chapters and journal articles. His most recent books are: *Doing Critical Social Work* (co-editor, Allen and Unwin, 2016), *Men, Masculinities and Disaster* (co-editor, Routledge, 2016), *Radicals in Australian Social Work* (co-editor, Connor Court, 2017) and *Critical Ethics of Care in Social Work* (co-editor, Routledge, 2018).

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Tom Vickers is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Nottingham Trent University, UK. His research interests concern class structures, exploitation and resistance under capitalism in its contemporary, imperialist stage. He has written on the implications for social workers of state oppression of refugees (*Refugees, Capitalism and the British State*, Ashgate, 2012) and changes to state welfare and immigration controls under conditions of crisis (*Borders, Migration and Class in an Age of Crisis*, Bristol University Press, forthcoming 2019). Tom is co-convenor of the BSA Activism in Sociology Forum and has written for various journals on topics such as ethnic diversity and social care (*Social Policy & Administration*), asylum rights organising and volunteering (*Ethnic & Racial Studies; Critical Sociology*), and media representations of migrants (*European Journal of Cultural Studies*). He teaches courses on social theory and public sociology.

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Foreword

Critical social work and social justice

Jan Fook

I have chosen to begin this foreword from a more personal perspective, given that the timeframe of the developments in critical social work from its early origins to the present day are very similar to the timeframe in the development of my own career, from the 1970s until now. I also feel personally privileged to be asked to write this foreword, as the use of the term 'critical' social work might be said to have been initiated in Australia, where I was born and raised, and where I began my academic career.

In the late 1970s in Australian social work we were quite intrigued with the debates in British social work literature regarding radical and Marxist-inspired approaches. Most schools of social work in Australia at the time used either American or British literature, as we had very little of our own at the time. However, the more radical orientation of British literature probably appealed to the slightly leftish perspective of Australian academia, and so I was easily influenced to use these debates to frame my own thinking. In addition, the school of social work where I studied my Master's degree had some influential British academics on the staff. So, in the early 1980s, near the beginning of my academic career, I was very taken with what we called then the 'radical critique' of social work, which was sceptical of how individualised approaches to social work practice 'blamed the victims' of structural and power inequalities. A more over-arching analysis of how systematic and institutional structures caused and perpetuated social problems was called for, and in this climate structural social work from Canada (Moreau, 1979) was also developed. However, much as I was enthusiastic about this perspective, I still remember nonetheless being concerned about how the overarching critique seemed to dismiss casework as a legitimate form of social work. I was worried that because structural issues also caused personal suffering, I strongly believed that social workers also needed to concern themselves with the immediate fallout from inequitable social structures. I argued that 'band aids' were needed in addition to more broad-reaching solutions.

I also believed that an additional inadequacy with structural analyses was that they did not include a detailed idea of what actual social work practice with individuals would look like. Writing remained more at the level of critique rather than practice. Given that the bulk of social work roles, in the UK and Australia, still involved work with individuals, children and families, this was a major problem. I vividly recall a seminal article by Stan Cohen titled 'It's alright for you to talk' (1975) which captured a frustration many of us felt with critiques which did little to outline specific ways that specific practices might be transformed. I worked on a book

called *Radical Casework* (published in 1993) which tried to address the omission, both of work with individual people, and of new strategies. I also drew on feminist perspectives which by the 1980s had begun to appear. Around that time two works by Australians Jim Ife (1999) and Karen Healy (2000) used the term 'critical' social work, just as I also became aware that there was burgeoning interest in this perspective from the UK.

In the 1990s I took an interest in post-modern thinking, and how such ideas might help develop critical perspectives, and apply more directly to social work practice. In 2002 I published a book on critical social work which combined these perspectives (Fook, 2002). This work continues to be used in later editions. The way in which our ideas about epistemology were potentially transformed by critical, postmodern and post structural thinking particularly captured my imagination. I felt that the understanding of how individual people participated in making knowledge was a breakthrough idea in developing more empowered relationships in and with the social world. It had the potential to give a window for individual social workers to act immediately in developing broader social changes. I felt that the epistemological approach elaborated by postmodern and post structural thinking actually enlivened this aspect of earlier critical theorising and did much to deepen and broaden understanding of the power dimension of knowledge making.

At the same time as I was working with these ideas, I undertook a major study of professional expertise with colleagues Martin Ryan and Linette Hawkins (Fook, Ryan and Hawkins, 2000). Whilst on the surface it appeared that this piece of work was totally divorced from my work on critical social work, what I discovered from studying professional expertise was a much more process-oriented (as opposed to outcome-oriented) perspective on how people learn and become expert. In this sense, being an expert was much less about being able to define particular outcomes as evidence of expertise, but more about the knowledge-making processes (and the skills) involved in the way experts related to knowledge. This, of course, had a lot to do with including a more person-centred and dynamic understanding of how knowledge is created. This was in contrast to the well-known 'banking' model of knowledge and education, referred to by Freire (1972) whereby knowledge was seen as finite, developed outside of a person and with its own empirical reality. The more reflexive understanding of an individual's relationship with knowledge reinforced my earlier understanding of how knowledge is made, developed from my other work on critical social work.

Connecting these two sets of learnings gave rise to my interest in critical reflection, which has provided the mainframe of my work to the present day. I realized that if social workers were to learn how to be expert, this involved learning a more empowered and reflexive orientation to knowledge-making. So it is that my interest in critical reflection is about helping social workers learn to create their own theory from their experience (in dialogue with other perspectives including existing theories) and thus to be more responsive in specific situations and contexts. In this way, individual workers can contribute to social changes by changing their thinking about the social world and finding ways to act accordingly. Workers who participate in my workshop programmes do speak of feeling more empowered, particularly by being freed from more restrictive ways of thinking and acting. This is the crux, I believe, of the importance of a critical educational experience to critical social work, and this is where I now choose to focus my main contribution to critical social work. It is still, however, pinned by an ongoing concern with turning more abstract theorizing and analysis into specific models, strategies and skills for practice. In some ways, there is some legitimate criticism of the idea of critical reflection (which now seems a universal orthodoxy) in that although it is almost universally required, there are still many people who do not know what it means in specific practice, especially in work environments which seem to be growing more unreflective by the second. There is still therefore much

work to do in translating the idea of critical reflection into workplace cultures and practices which support it. This challenge is usefully addressed in this volume and I am really pleased to see that the challenge is taken up.

I therefore really welcome the publication of this Routledge International volume at this time, as in some ways it might be said to mark a real 'coming of age' for critical social work. As I will discuss briefly further on, the volume also comes at a time when there are very serious global threats to what in some ways we might have taken for granted even a few years earlier, that is, the slow progress towards a more socially just society. The contents of the Handbook represent a vast array of different perspectives and international contributions which testify to the complexity and sophistication of where our thinking is now at. It is important to note that critical social work is now not theorised from just one perspective (it includes at the very least Marxist and neo-Marxist thinking, feminist, post-structural, critical social theories, critical race theory, post-colonial theory, and social constructivism). It also has implications for how we approach research (e.g. discourse analysis and narrative perspectives) and also that there are international differences in the way it is conceptualized and practised. In this latter sense the contextual nature of social work, and the theoretical perspectives which are valued in different international contexts, is underscored. The Handbook includes a very comprehensive framework from which to examine how critical social work has developed from its early roots; how critical social work is currently conceptualized; potential policy and practice applications; and also what it can become. Contributions from Ireland, Europe, the UK, the USA, Australia, Canada and New Zealand give the book a very wide reach.

Of course, it is also necessary to question the relevance of a critical social work perspective in an age where structural inequalities are broadening, and where the political and cultural climate seems to be taking a turn in the opposite direction. I refer of course to global happenings which have wide repercussions. First in the UK there is the vote to leave the European Union, which signifies for many a move away from partnership with other countries, a 'Britain First' cry (I live one mile from where the member of parliament Jo Cox was murdered by a man uttering this cry) which signifies a worrying trend towards more aggressively ethnocentric attitudes and acts. The fear of global terrorism and the wide range of reactions it has spurred include hostile suspicion of people of the Muslim tradition across the Western world. The plight of refugees is also of contemporary concern. Although there have almost always been refugees in recent eras of world history, at the present time there does appear to be a less compassionate stance emerging, whereby many countries seem more disposed to close their doors rather than welcome with open arms. Then there is the election of Donald Trump as President of the USA, and the resulting support his behaviour gives towards far-right groups, as well as more isolationist and protectionist policies. These populist trends speak of a general turn away from the values often associated with a critical stance and analysis. And it is also worrying that for all the progressive trends developed over the last few decades, and the highly developed nature of political analysis, there was little prediction that such a turn could happen so quickly. It is as if, on one level, globalisation has resulted in the predicted widening gap between social classes. This was perhaps evidenced, in one way, by the apparent inadequacy of the ruling middle classes in appreciating the perspectives and experiences of classes who felt increasingly disenfranchised.

These international trends do point of course to the need for social workers, particularly critical social workers, to reassess whether theories and perspectives taken from a different time still have relevance in the way they are interpreted and put into action. From this point of view, it is very welcome to see contributions in the book which address the role of new social movements, as these also bespeak other types of trends. The inclusion of green perspectives, for example, gives a broader sweep to critical ideas, and gives voice to some of the major concerns of a

newer generation of social workers. In some ways the task of critical social work has become a more disparate and disjointed endeavour, not easily united or formulated through one major tradition of thought. This volume functions to provide the broad sweep and overview of the various aspects of critical social work which now need to be recognised on the international stage. It successfully showcases the different types of thinking and practices we desperately need to take us forward into a future which appears uncertain, and in which many sections of our global population are certain to suffer more. It breathes new life into a perspective which is needed much more than ever before in its short history, in trying to achieve social justice, at global as well as local levels.

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Acknowledgements

The task of editing the large collection of chapters which make up this volume is a singular event. Over its duration and development many friends and sympathetic minds have made this possible. First of all, a special thanks to the immensely talented group of international contributors who have made this *Routledge Handbook of Critical Social Work* possible. They have all added to my understanding of the richness and diversity of this field. Most importantly, together they have made a unique and original contribution to the field of critical social work. I want to especially thank Jan Fook for writing the Foreword. My work as editor has been eased by the assistance and support from Routledge and I would like to thank Georgia Priestley, Editorial Assistant for guiding this large publication through the various processes and helping me to deliver the manuscript in a timely fashion. The editor is really appreciative of the first-class copy-editing and proofreading by Katharine Bartlett. Also, huge thanks and appreciation go to Lance Cheek and my wife Penelope for providing copy-editing assistance with the volume. Without the tireless help of Lance and close attention to detail the task of editing would have been made so much more difficult. A special thanks goes to my colleagues in social work at Glasgow Caledonian University as we mark this publication with our new Department of Social Work. These colleagues rarely overlook the importance of sharing as a collective. The progressive spirit and affirmation of social work values has been a constant reminder of the worthiness of the critical social work perspective.

Introduction

Critical social work and the politics of transformation

Stephen A. Webb

It is hard to ignore the huge influence translated to our intellectual and practical life in social work by the progressive writers and activists of the radical Left. This is also the case with the left-inspired writings of critical social work for the social work profession and welfare practice as a whole. Through contemporary political history the intellectual of the Left is a 'liberationist' and a 'transformatist'. She or he seeks social justice for the masses, and emancipation from inequalities, alienation and oppression for human kind. The oppression that governs society binds the people in chains of exploitation and at the same time generates an alienated form of consciousness which cripples potential. The moral importance of this stance is obvious. By linking the contemporary call for 'liberation' to the old cause of 'social justice' the New Left speaks in the moral interests of humanity. And 'social justice' is a goal so overwhelmingly important, and so understandably superior to the 'established interests' which stand against it, as to purify all activism carried out in its name. For the politics of the left is a politics with a goal: your place within the alliance of progressive ideas is judged by the lengths you are prepared to go to on behalf of 'social justice'. As we shall see throughout this book critical social work positions itself clearly and decisively on the Left as an agent for change. This is a good reason for including political transformation in the title of this Introduction. To paraphrase Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos (2008), social and political transformation is not about cultivating faith in the change to come, it is about honing our senses so that we can perceive the processes which create change in everyday life. Social transformation is not about reason and belief, it is about issues, perception and matters of concern. It is not about the production of subjects, but about the making of a life. It is not about subjectivity, it is about lived experience – it's about possible forms-of-life.

The *Routledge Handbook of Critical Social Work* brings together the world's leading scholars in the field to provide a cutting-edge overview of classic and current research and future trends in critical social work. At the same time, it provides an authoritative guide to the international scene of progressive thinking, in its theoretical and methodological forms, and the primary debates of today in social work from a critical perspective. The Handbook will be a major reference work and the first book to comprehensively map the wide-ranging territory of critical social work. It does so by addressing its conceptual developments, its methodological advances, its value base for front-line practice and its influence on the policy field. It offers a definitive

survey of current academic knowledge as it relates to professional practice. The Handbook benefits from bringing together world class specialists to reflect on an international range of issues, perspectives and matters of concern. Its strength lies in the depth and range of content and use of interdisciplinary frameworks for addressing critical social work. The Handbook thus surveys and extends upon the state of the sub-discipline of critical social work, providing a comprehensive, up to date, definitive major work of reference while at the same time identifying emerging and cutting-edge areas.

Setting the scene for critical social work

Critical social work designates several generations of key ideas, themes, commitments and activities originating in a progressive political stance that emerged in the 1970s. The 1960s and 70s saw a rise in interest in the social consequences of capitalism (Howe, 2009). Radical social work was developed in an attempt to alleviate the consequences imposed on individuals in a dominant capitalist society (Leonard, 1978). Radical social work involved understanding oppression in the context of social and economic structures rather than affixing the problems to the individuals who are oppressed (Brake and Bailey, 1975). It deliberately avoided the individualising tendencies of psychological and psychoanalytic casework. A radical social worker's role involved positive assistance, the sustaining of mutual respect and the location of a service user's problems in a wider social and political context (Brake and Bailey, 1975). Critical social work emerged out of radical social work, primarily in an Australian context. Critical social work theorists originally adopted the term from critical theory, a sociological and philosophical theory that evolved from the so-called 'Frankfurt School' of German social thinkers. Today, critical social work perspectives are 'no longer strictly aligned with critical theory' (Hick, Fook and Pozzuto, 2005: xi). According to this perspective, a 'critical' theory is distinguished from traditional social work approaches because it is bound to a distinctive set of progressive values: a perspective is *critical* to the extent that it seeks social transformation as forms of justice, equality and emancipation. Critical social workers are therefore committed to understanding, critiquing and transforming the profession of social work and the unjust nature of society.

Critical social work, then, seeks to explain and transform various circumstances that social workers, carers and service users find themselves in, while connecting this to a structural analysis of those aspects of society that are oppressive, unjust and exploitative. In this respect, critical social work emerged in connection with various intellectual movements that identified dimensions of economic and political domination in modern societies, including feminism, race theory, postmodernism and Marxist criticism. Critical social work tends to use these intellectual movements as strategies of thought rather than as specific theories. This allows for a variety of readings, interpretations and engagements. While critical social work carries with it an idea of an intellectual whole, it is clear that there are divergent approaches within it. However, adherents share certain key concepts and theoretical trajectories. As Healy (2001: 13) comments:

> Despite their obvious variations, what these critical approaches to practice share is their foundation in the critical social science paradigm . . . there is a general endorsement of critical social science understandings about the nature of the social work and human existence.

Intellectual movements such as Marxism, postmodernism and feminism have provided critical social work with the theoretical and political resources to deal with issues, particularly in relation to social justice, emancipation, power relations, oppression, exploitation and domination. Pease and Fook's foreword to *Transforming Social Work Practice* captures these emphases when they ask:

> How can we maintain what was positive and liberating in the critical tradition in social work, the emancipatory side of the Enlightenment, but still use postmodernism to deconstruct the problematic elements in the metanarratives of feminism, Marxism, and other critical perspectives to the point where reconstruction becomes possible?
>
> *(1999: 2)*

According to Healy (2001: 2) critical social work refers to a broad range of practice theories that share the following orientations:

- a recognition that large-scale social processes, particularly those associated with class, race and gender, contribute fundamentally to the personal and social issues social workers encounter in their practice;
- the adoption of a self-reflexive and critical stance to the often-contradictory effects of social work practice and social policies;
- a commitment to co-participatory rather than authoritarian practice relations. This involves workers and service users, as a well as academics, practitioners and service users as co-participants engaged with, but still distinct from, one another;
- working with and for oppressed populations to achieve social transformation.

Critical social work thus encompasses a range of approaches that challenge the assumptions upon which societies and welfare practices have been governed. It takes the view that collectivism and partial homogeneity required by any democratic situation have increasingly been undermined by the socio-economic processes of liberalisation and marketisation typical of modern capitalist societies. Critical social work also takes a decisive stance against the modern State. Contrary to the classical Hobbesian formulation that the duties of citizens are owed to the State, critical social work adopts a cynical view of the modern State. The state is not seen as a sovereign subjectivity with will and power of its own, but as a social relation as a strategic assemblage of power. The state is a creation of social dynamics, a terrain where it is played out, and an important agency therein. The state is created by social antagonism. Its institutions correspond to the reproduction of the rule of certain social forces or authorities over others. It does not possess power; rather, state power is a condensation of social dynamics mediated by the state institutions. Thus, the state is an (uneven) terrain of social antagonism and an apparatus of control. Social forces struggle to define and defy state power by capturing, adjusting, resisting, influencing, abolishing and reforming state institutions. And, the state is a key agency in social antagonism. It selects and combines the strategies of some forces into state power (and excludes others) and helps organise social forces and their strategies (and disorganise others). Its agency or assemblage is geared not towards securing its own interest or promoting its own rule, but towards advancing those of the social forces that are predominantly represented through its institutions. The paradox being of course that social workers are often agents of the State that critical social work comes to abhor.

Critical social work requires an understanding of the historical development of theory in social work practice as it relates to key debates and fields of practice. Critical practice frameworks are informed by analysis of the range of theoretical perspectives informing contemporary policy and practice contexts, principles of ethical social work practice, and application of lessons learned from the history of the development of social work as a profession. Moreover, critical social workers assume 'that a better social world is possible and that the achievement of a better social world requires a qualitative change in current social relations' (Hick, Fook and Pozzuto, 2005: xi). They assume that social workers have a responsibility to engage in the difficult and creative work of imagining and building a better social world.

Redefining the meaning of critical social work

Bob Pease gives a fascinating account of the birth of the term 'critical social work' and its origins in Hobart, Tasmania in the Australian educational context:

> In the early 1980s when I was reviewing the curriculum of the social work course which I taught in Australia, I approached my head of school with a proposal to teach a new subject titled 'radical social work'. I was told in no uncertain terms that I couldn't use the language of 'radical' and that I had to find an alternative title. So 'critical social work' was born. This was over 10 years before Ife (1997) introduced the term in the published literature in Australia.
>
> *(2009: 191)*

Cool tactical improvisation when up against the constituent power of 'management'. This of course points to the causal linkage between social language, prevailing moral ideology and social reality.[1] As Skinner states, 'to recover the nature of the normative vocabulary available to an agent for the description and evaluation of his conduct is at the same time to indicate one of the constraints on his conduct itself' (1989: 22). However, it is now accepted that critical social work is a generic term – for an approach to practice, policy and research – that draws on critical theory and progressive Left thinking to promote social and economic justice through transformational change and insurrection. Elsewhere, I have referred to critical social work as having a narrow and a broad meaning in social work (Gray and Webb, 2009, 2013; McKendrick and Webb, 2014):

1   *Critical social work*, when capitalized, refers only to the narrow definition and use of the term.
2   *critical social work* in lowercase denotes all other uses in the broader sense.

Many texts bearing the title 'critical social work' fall into the second category. However, some aspects of the broader perspective may have obvious relations with its counterpart – Critical social work – and sometimes appear as Critical social work with a capital 'C' – this is due to their drawing on common components to which some key thinkers have contributed rather than to a well thought-through theorizing of Critical social work. For example, critical postmodernism draws on Foucault's theorising of power and emphasises critical reflection, but its roots are in social constructionism more than Marxist or critical theory. In my view, the latter narrow sense of 'Critical social work' designates several generations of key ideas, themes and commitments that originated in a progressive political stance which emerged in the 1970s. According to this perspective, a 'critical theory' is distinguished from traditional social work approaches according to a specific set of values: a theory is *critical* to the extent that it constitutes a political project and seeks social transformation as forms of justice and emancipation. Critical social work in this narrow sense seeks to explain and transform various circumstances that social workers and service users find themselves in, while connecting this to a structural analysis of those aspects of society that are oppressive, unjust and exploitative in nature. In this respect, 'Critical social work' with an uppercase 'C' emerged in connection with various intellectual movements, including feminism, race theory and postcolonial criticism that identified dimensions of economic and political domination in modern societies.

Critical social work in the broad sense (with a lower case 'c') is indicative of a much more generic approach that attenuates the necessary attributes and characteristics for effective interventions. While it is sensitive to core social work values, this broader sense is much more concerned with developing 'best practice' agendas that can maximize the potential for social workers and service users. Typically, the emphasis is on 'being critical' as a crucial disposition and in relation to

existing practices, organizations, ideas, and policies. It draws attention to the value of using criticism as a capacity to contrast, reformulate or challenge existing practices. It contends that social workers *should necessarily be critical* and reflective in all their dealings with other human beings. Payne's (1996) 'critical contrastive approach' is an almost perfect embodiment of critical social work perspective with a little 'c', wherein he accentuates the need to engage in 'critical reflection using theory'. The main emphases are on finding alternatives, recognizing the client's strengths and resilience, and identifying the inadequacies of resource provision. While it is still reconstructive, unlike the narrower sense of Critical social work, this perspective does not couple a structural analysis, of say, oppressive regimes in modern societies with a set of militant commitments, engagements and resistances toward change. In this sense, critical social work, while recognizing existing institutions and policies as obstacles to the emergence of better forms of engagement with service users, remains committed to the prevailing liberal democratic mode of political rule. The unifying element of critical social work is its adherence to a liberal humanist sentiment. Thus, transformation is concerned with the incremental modification of individuals, resources and interventions within the current state of affairs rather than wholesale economic and political change. In this respect, critical social work, unlike structural social work, tends to focus on the cognitive work of the practitioner emphasizing change at the individual or community level rather than demanding the necessity of widespread structural change. Adams, Dominelli and Payne's (2009) book fits this mould in only partially accommodating the stricter and more authentic aspects of Critical social work. Along with reflective practice, critical best practice, the service-user movement, the strengths perspective, and empowerment and advocacy, it typifies a softer set of persuasions that have the tendency of neutralizing the systematic political intent of the more progressive elements of Critical social work.

Likewise, empowerment reflects an ambivalence which can be read either as endorsing a critical approach to social work or one that evokes neoliberal affinities based on individual responsibility and choice in a market economy of social care provision. Much theorizing about empowerment in social work typifies the latter, falling into an exclusively individualist account of change. The mantra of empowerment has been deployed in a number of misleading ways thus enabling easy appropriation by commentators of various political persuasions and, most often, simply as an acid test of service-users' ability to make their own choices and decisions free from protectionist social interventions.

Handbook structure and content

The Handbook is divided into six parts each focusing on a broad thematic area of investigation relating to critical social work. It is designed to provide the first complete survey and analysis of the vibrant field of critical social work.

Part I explores the historical, social, and political influences that have impacted on critical social work. Part II maps the rich theoretical and conceptual terrain. Part III focuses on methods of engagement and modes of analysis which critical social work draws upon. Part IV takes up various critical contexts for practice and policy. This part is divided into two sections organised to deal with (i) issues, geographies, and politics; and (ii) justice, empowerment and service users. Part V of the Handbook explores the role of professional education and socialisation. In Part VI future challenges, directions and transformations are explored. The book structure seeks to strike a balance between thematic coherence and a sense of chronology with critical social work. The next section provides details with a user-friendly guide to the content of various parts with the overall range and scope of the Handbook.

Part I of the Handbook rigorously maps the historical, social and political influences that have successively shaped critical social work. It demonstrates the way critical social work distinguishes

itself from mainstream perspectives. Critical social work scholars have challenged the theoretical and normative assumptions of mainstream social work scholarship and have analysed social work in a variety of transnational sites. Baines (2007: 4) uses the term 'mainstream social work' to describe these perspectives and says:

> Although often claiming the opposite, mainstream social work tends to view social problems in a depoliticized way that emphasizes individual shortcomings, pathology and inadequacy. Interventions are aimed largely at the individual with little or no analysis of or intent to challenge power, structures, social relations, culture or economic forces.

Mainstream social work is always regarded as ideological because it is implicated in semi-stable hierarchies of value that authorize particular ways of seeing and speaking as a practitioner. These practices are routinised and organised as institutional boundaries are forged between different ways of knowing the very same thing, spawning the social configurations we call profession, craft, and discipline. Critical social work and mainstream social work are informed by some fundamentally different assumptions, especially ontological, epistemological and political assumptions. Critical social work has created an intellectual space in which research on diverse theoretical and empirical aspects of social work has flourished. The debates over the conceptualisation of critical social work – as discourse, field of professionals, socially just practice or value base – have been supplemented by important methodological questions. This part of the book proposes fresh understandings of social work by developing new frameworks for analysis by critical social work scholars.

We have seen that one central ambition of critical social work is to concretely determine means of productive counter-practices. It does this by focusing on normative issues and interventions in social work and further afield, such as immigration policy and inequalities in employment opportunities. Social work is essentially situated in political life, both in front-line practice and in the policy and research field. Its interventions and functions take place in fields of contestation and domination. Social work is a practice of and with power relations; social work exercises power and is inscribed by power relations. For example, risk assessments have been a practice of statecraft through creating populations as a category for intervention upon which social workers are expected to act.

In Part II of the Handbook contributors map the theoretical and conceptual terrain which forms the critical social work perspective. The aim of this part is to translate the central characteristics of critical social work concepts into methods, values and key ideas. Theory is the starting point where the epistemological, ontological and normative questions and perspectives are established. The stakes for critical social work remain at the theoretical level. From this vantage point scholars show how critical social work can inform front-line practice and policy. Moreover, the construction of conceptual histories can have the emancipatory effect of opening up the normative or unidimensional discourse in whose terms our political conversations have for too long been conducted (Ball, 1989: 4).

Critical social work takes a distinctive approach to power and power relations. It does not only localise power in specific classes of actors but also in connections and translation processes between groups and networks. As such, power is never held within one individual but rather is conceptualised as relational, held collectively – but never symmetrically with the network. The term 'network' indicates that resources are concentrated in a few places – the entanglements, knots and nodes – which perform inequalities and abuses of power.

Social work interventions do not come from nowhere. Critical social work does not simply unpack the methods and interventions at work in social work processes but involves detailed analytics of issues and controversies in which these interventions are 'enacted' and performed.

Thus, contributors ask what are the political dynamics, strategic imperatives and institutional facilitators which allow interventions to be mobilised? How do key concepts enable critical social work to make political sense of these and change them?

Part III outlines a critical stance to methods and analysis in social work. It is a platform for developing methods and methodological frameworks in critical social work by proposing a performative and experimental approach to methods. For example, there is a growing interest in ethnographic and anthropological interests for critical social work. The intensified calls for visual methods and the outspoken use of network analysis runs parallel with innovative methodological interest in critical social work. A research interest in new materialist methods is gaining momentum in critical social work. This part will show that methods are not simply tools to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Rather, to practise methods critically means engaging in a more free and experimental interplay between theory, methods and practice. This recognises that the social work practices we research are often methods in their own right, as forms of evaluation, surveillance, data mining, visualisation, and so on, and that our own research methods are themselves practices that intervene and interfere in those sites of practice.

Against the familiar methodological language of rigour, detachment and procedural consistency, this approach reclaims the idea of method as experiment. The chapters offer a series of methodological experimentations that assemble concepts, theory and empirical cases into new frameworks for critical social work research. They show how critical engagement and methodological innovation can be practised as interventions into diverse instances of practice and policy.

In Part IV the Handbook material focuses on critical contexts for practice and policy. It is divided into two sections. The first section concentrates on issues, geographies, and politics. The chapters show how a democratic politics for social work should be more attuned to issue formation within specified geographies. It suggests that the articulation of a social service involves contestation of institutional issue definitions, in controversies that are likely to transcend procedural settings. Issue formation is increasingly appreciated as a crucial dimension of democratic politics and resistance. People's involvement in politics is likely to be mediated by problems that affect them. As discussed below such an approach provides an alternative to discursivist analysis of the role of 'issue framing' in the involvement of publics in politics. By approaching issues as particular entanglements of actors' attachments, it becomes possible to credit these entanglements as sources and resources for enacting matters of concern to critical social work.

A further concept developed in recent sociological thought is the term 'attachment' to denote a relation between human and non-human entities that is characterized by both 'active commitment' and 'dependency'. The concept can be used to describe the relations of drug users to their drugs and of music lovers to music, but it may be equally useful to characterize the networks that are at stake in public controversies, such as the Calais Jungle, the asylum seeker camp. The politics of attachment may be understood in relation to issues, geographies and local ecologies. This can help with a better understanding of activism, protest and controversy mobilisation in critical social work. A particular combination of 'dependency on' and 'commitment to' such associations characterises actors' involvement in issues: the 'endangerment' of associations brings dependency into relief and may be productive of commitment.

The second section in Part IV builds out of this engagement with politics as issues, entanglements, and localities to focus on aspects of justice, empowerment, and service users as they relate to critical social work. For critical social workers, we are our brother's and sister's keeper. Social workers claim social justice as a defining value of the profession and as a goal for practice, research, and education. As a broad concept, social justice is represented by fair treatment, freedom from discrimination, the elimination of institutionalized domination and oppression, and the redressing of inequality for historically oppressed groups through the creation of equal

opportunity and condition. Practice interventions often associated with social justice include advocacy; empowerment of service users through consciousness-raising, skill-building, and resource development; community education and organising; legislative and media activism; social movement participation.

Advocacy and activism provide an avenue for all social workers to connect their practice with the profession's aim of social justice. According to the *NASW Code of Ethics* social workers also apply social-justice principles to structural problems in the social service agencies in which they work. Armed with the long-term goal of empowering their clients, they use knowledge of existing legal principles and organizational structure to suggest changes to protect their clients, who are often powerless and underserved. The Canadian Association of Social Workers (2005) further explicates the link between advocacy and social justice:

> Social workers advocate for fair and equitable access to public services and benefits. Social workers advocate for equal treatment and protection under the law and challenge injustices, especially injustices that affect the vulnerable and disadvantaged.
>
> *(CASW, 2005: 5)*

Each contribution in this section questions the realities of oppressive situations as seen through the lens of a more global perspective, thus assisting in cultivating a critical perspective on power and domination. Chapters in this section also focus on an ethic of care in acknowledging our interdependence belongs in all aspects of lived experience including the family, companion species, community, society and global dimensions.

In Part V the focus of the chapter contributions is on important aspects of professional education and socialisation as they impinge on critical social work considerations. From a critical social work perspective, it is maintained that the impact of neoliberalism on higher education reduces the social work curriculum to competency-based skills acquisition rather than critically reflective, transformative learning. The 'hidden curriculum' in social work education reflects market pressures that privilege task-oriented goals while 'mainstreaming' social justice rhetoric. Skills to confront oppression with transformative change are regarded as abstract goals and thus less useful than technical practice. This encourages the promotion of normative social work approaches aimed at accepting the status quo, rather than critical forms of social work that critique the dominant social structures and power relations which divide society. The continued marginalisation of critical approaches reshapes social work towards conservative, market-led demands, yet an explicitly critical social work curriculum is pivotal to the claim of social work as an emancipatory project.

Critical reflection has become a central and defining concept for critical social work. It bears a close resemblance to an old Aristotelian idea of 'skohlè' a word that gives most European languages a meaning of among other things, a time of freedom, a moment of reflection that is an important part of the rhythm of professional life. It is the space within which to reflect upon progress achieved, to re-examine core purposes and values, and to experiment with trying out alternatives. Skohlè is the site in and through which both action and theory are developed through critical dialogue. It is a time in which the different focuses of knowledge held by practitioners and organisations are released from habitual associations and mundane tasks. In approaching critical reflection as primary foundation the chapters in this part examine claims that social work education prepares students to enter a value-driven, applied profession in a vast array of settings and with diverse areas of specialty. Although educational mandates and necessary practice competencies are set forth, there is little empirical evidence related to how the overarching value of social justice is made manifest in professional education programmes.

Many challenges to professional social work cultures can be seen as stemming from the perhaps more traditional 'therapeutic' traditions of some professions, which is contrasted with the more 'educational' orientation of critical reflection.

A further dimension is explored in this part of the Handbook. As Ledwith (2001) and Rossiter (1996) argue, the political nature of education situates social work academics as either agents of the state who perpetuate the status quo, or as agents of transformation who create contexts to question dominant practices. In the current climate of privatisation, fast-track programmes such as Frontline in the UK and of social services austerity, students are increasingly forced to justify their existence in narrow performance indicator terms about value for money, case management workload or performance efficiencies.

Part VI of the Handbook invites readers to think about future directions and innovations for critical social work. This final part succinctly presents the various methodological, conceptual and practice contexts for the emergence of new ideas and issues. It addresses increasing global relevance of several critical themes and issues such as human rights and good governance, participation, peace, gender, environment, social protection and partnership. It appreciates the sheer scale of political opposition, but calls to look beyond them to visualise future directions in social work. The part demonstrates how a values-driven perspective needs to focus on knowledge creation, dissemination and training, draw on multidisciplinary knowledge and professionals, create less unequal societies and engage in innovation that brings social justice to people.

This part of the Handbook raises a series of fundamental issues at stake. Can the proliferation of critical social work formats facilitate meaningful engagement with social service affairs and policy, or does it threaten to impoverish or even undermine political democracy? How do the core concerns of critical social work become newly relevant to social and political life: preoccupations with the authority of experts and the mobilisation of protest, activism and controversy; the rhetorical power of demonstrations and their capacity to elicit engagement, consent, and 'lock-in'; or the role of critical social workers in recasting the relationship between political, economic and social domains.

Chapters in the final part of the Handbook also reflect on the proliferation of experimental formats in social movements, economic organization, and public life as they impact on a critical social work trajectory. The chapters outline several strands of scholarship that, through the study of experiment and innovation, have developed a materialist, situational and performative understanding of the making of social work, and its relation to service users, carers, policy makers and politicians. At the heart of this scholarship lies a series of innovative strands: the fact that critical social work as participation operates as both an object of inquiry and a device that actors including practitioners, students, researchers and service users themselves can deploy for the creation of new collectives and forms of resistance.

Political ontology and innovation in critical social work

What it means to be critical or radical in social work is in a state of flux and change. Historically, constant change appears to be one of the few constant things about our political concepts. Language functions in overtly and covertly political ways by playing upon the interests, concerns and needs of individuals or groups that use it. Donald Trump's slogan 'Make America Great Again' is an obvious example of how language can be effectively played into national populist sentiment. Understanding what can be called the 'political constitution of language' is crucial for understanding conceptual change in critical social work (Farr, 1989: 26). Political concepts help constitute the beliefs which inform action and practice. As Farr explains:

How revolutionaries will respond to a government's decree will depend upon their shared beliefs about what actions and practices the revolution requires. And these beliefs are partly constituted by the concept of 'revolution' which these revolutionaries hold. Some actions and practices will be believed to be 'revolutionary', others 'reformist', still others 'counter-revolutionary'. In this way conceptual conflict may express political conflict.

(1989: 28)

Similarly, critical social work is constituted through beliefs, which guide practice and action, and rest on conceptual change and innovation. It rediscovers and rethinks problems; traces out new lines of inquiry not previously recorded (Powell and Taylor's chapter on ageing and veterans in this book is a good example of this, as is, Farmer's on controversy analysis and the issue of no recourse to public funding for immigrant women and children); it grapples with ideas that earlier seemed irrelevant when judged by present day standards; it criticises contradictions or stances which originally went unnoticed. In performing these tasks the critical social worker opens up the prospect that things may have been different – in concept, belief, or action and practice. In this way critical social work helps stimulate the critical, creative, experimental and even utopia impulse which characterises political theory of any age. What is most evident and perhaps most dramatic is that critical social work at the end of the first decade of the 21st century is very different from the legacies of radical social work in the 1960s and 70s.

An obvious difference and change is around the relation between social work and service users and carers. Critical social work differs from mainstream practices by insisting more adamantly on having service users and practitioners themselves describe the connections, passage points, inequalities and imbalances that make up service provision. With this co-production principle, it is also the service-users' own objectives that help constitute the measure of success in the establishment of preferred outcomes.

Various contributions in this Handbook make a conscious attempt to strategically add a further vital trajectory of intellectual practice theory to critical social work. This involves acknowledging the deep significance of political ontology, or in shorthand 'the ontological turn in the social sciences'. This implies the awareness and acceptance of antagonism, partiality, contingency and conflict: every action becomes politics, when it at least becomes touched by antagonism. Political ontology is thus the study of the political stakes of the question of being, whereby being is an issue. An obvious example of this is the status and existential threat posed to immigrant boat people in their desperate attempts to cross the Mediterranean, or migrant women who are refused access to public funding by social services for housing and child support precisely because of their migrant status. The foregrounding of political ontology requires a fundamental shift in the way we think about politics in critical social work. As Hay (2011: 2) explains 'ontological assumptions (relating to the nature of the political reality that is the focus of our analytical attentions) are logically antecedent to the epistemological and methodological choices more usually identified as the source of paradigmatic divergence in political science' such as Marxism and feminism. We can sum this up by noting that ontology relates to the nature of the social and political world, epistemology to what we can know about it, and methodology to how we might go about acquiring that knowledge. Thus, ontology logically precedes epistemology for any analysis of politics. The failure to acknowledge the antecedent nature of political ontology in critical social work effectively means turning a blind eye to this significance. Hay goes on to say 'Ontology relates to *being*, to what *is*, to what *exists*, to the constituent units of reality; political ontology, by extension, relates to *political being*, to what *is* politically, to what *exists politically*, and to the units that comprise political reality' (2011: 4). A critical social work which mobilises political ontology will be interested in the way power affects the lived

experience of a phenomenon, how it touches it, how it captures it, and how it effectuates its power to be affected.

Approaches which are rooted in a political ontology paradigm variously include Actor Network Theory, sociotechnical studies (STS), economic sociology, critiques of biopolitics, object-oriented ontology, affect theory, posthumanist politics, Deleuzian philosophy, feminist theories of distributed agency and the emerging socio-materiality paradigm (see Despret, 2013). Let's briefly look at STS as an example of political ontology at work. A core question for STS and the authors in the Handbook that tackle them is to ask how social work works in practice and if there is an economy to social work that has political consequences? They work, that is, on the assumption that what they often call 'technoscience' is a set of social and material practices that are entangled in power relations. A political ontologist wants to learn about how these power operations come into play, are mobilised and sustained in different contexts. As a rule of thumb they insist on contingency, that these practices work in different ways in different locations. As John Law states:

> STS authors talk about laboratories, firms and hospitals, and also (since STS interests are wide) about financial traders, farms, care homes and indigenous knowledge practices. They look at how theories, methods, and material pieces of equipment are used in practice in specific social, organisational, cultural and national contexts.
>
> *(2015, n.p.)*

STS approaches delineate a picture of socio-material worlds as always-emergent heterogeneous assemblages of humans and more-than-humans. STS works through its case-studies that subdue the temptation to regard human exceptionalism as the only virtuous agency on a living planet. If you want to understand STS you need to read it through its cases. How fishermen and scallops interact in practice. How engineers and military chiefs create a warplane (Law, ibid). How peacocks perform as spectacular, colourful agents of seduction for Darwin. How Roma communities in 'deprived' areas of Glasgow interact and deal with bed bugs as part of political protest (Lynch's chapter in this book). STS is introduced in this Handbook as lending itself decisively to the critical social work agenda. This is a deliberate move to use contributions in the Handbook to steer critical social work beyond preoccupations with 'discursivity', postmodernism and identity politics. Certain authors have been selected who can contribute to this additional practice theory trajectory in contemporary social sciences. The STS perspective offers some incredibly suggestive and fertile insights for social work, all of which can build on the foundational ideas of Marxism and feminism. STS posits the constitutive entanglement of the social, technical and the material in front-line practice. In rolling theory and method and empirical practice together with social institutions, material objects and entanglements it can make a fresh and cutting-edge contribution to critical social work. This approach claims that sociotechnical systems are developed through negotiations between people, institutions, and non-humans (e.g. companion species, see Haraway, 2003). But STS make the additional interesting argument that artefacts are part of these negotiations as well. This is not to say that machines think like people do and decide how they will act, but their behaviour or nature often has a comparable role. Actor network theorists, for example, argue that the material world pushes back on people because of its physical structure and design. So, the rich contribution STS can make to critical social work is based on the premise that everyday organising is inextricably bound up with materiality and that this relationship is inadequately reflected in social work studies that tend to ignore it, take it for granted, or treat it as a special case. The result is an understanding of politics and its activism, values and consequences that is necessarily limited. Adding this trajectory of STS

intellectual thought helps reconfigure conventional assumptions of power in critical social work and closer considerations of materiality help us more effectively recognise and respond to the multiple, emergent, and shifting political assemblages entailed in contemporary practice. STS, in its wider political philosophy, also tells us something decisive about the nature of appropriation, community, Statism and property.

Taking a political stance in social work

A consistent message that comes across time and time again throughout this large collection of chapters is that neoliberal capitalism is inflicting untold damage on people and the planet. The Handbook authors tirelessly expose the vast and deeply entrenched inequalities, the workings of the machinery of fear, underresourced public services and systematic examples of injustice that are wreaked on the poor, disadvantaged and vulnerable. The USA has recently elected a President to the most powerful position in the world who deliberately wishes to exacerbate this horrific state of affairs. We live in an era of gross unfairness and unprecedented greed. Dorling (2018) starkly illustrates this state of affairs in the UK: '130,000 children woke up in temporary B&B accommodation on Christmas day 2017' (2018: 25). He has shown in the UK there are many statistics today that point at Britain being at a peak of inequality. When income inequality is so high, the richest try harder than ever to avoid paying taxes as they amass so much wealth that could be taxed. The repercussions of living with high inequality, the highest in Europe, are like living with a ticking time-bomb. Having allowed the gaps between us to grow so wide has had dire implications for our health, housing, education, demography, politics, ecology and the future. Badiou (2001) describes this situation of global neoliberal capitalist violence as 'evil' in its imposition of ideological 'truth' regimes, such as the 'war on terror', and celebration of the market, as the only viable economic model, propped up by the authoritative State. Where does social work situate itself in relation to the evil of neoliberal capitalism? And what stance does it take in constructing new political forms?

Radical resistance in social work is tactically best suited to specific issues via small groups and in the workplace or up against the constituent power of management. Let me put this into stark relief. In 1988 the Piper Alpha oil rig – 100 miles off the east coast here in Scotland in the North Sea – exploded and went up in flames. The process operating system (e.g. uninterrupted production) on the rig was given priority by management over safety which was given appropriate attention for major incidents. Management failed to install a water deluge system which proved decisive. These decisions are by management in the interest of commercial profit. They are exercises in power that amounted to absolute evidence of negligence. And the death of 167 people. The management of Occidental were never prosecuted over Piper Alpha.

Never underestimate the power of resistance. In a study on community engagement and climate change carried out in 2015, we were most surprised to discover just how multinational corporations and local state bureaucrats are terrified of social protest and radical mobilisation. This is especially true when a public issue gains salience with the media. Many protest groups are unaware of the panic they excite in the minds of the bosses. Big business and their state bureaucrat allies get scared and become intensely risk aversive about inciting public protest and controversy. They neither understand nor can account for what they see as an 'emotive and irrational public'. This small fact may be a striking tactical lesson for critical social work. Talking about and organising around issues of social inequality and injustice is a threat to political power – the capitalist class. Badiou constantly reminds us that successful protests and uprisings in different domains have often taken place because of the actions of minorities (see Hewlett, 2010).

Social work can become a politics of refusal. It can rediscover a new sense of promise and negate and react against the violence of neoliberal capitalism. Badiou's (2010) *Communist Hypothesis* rests on a simple, yet important conviction: we need to be able to envision something other than capitalism, and the concept of communism – as shared community – makes this possible. There is little doubt that the potency for social work in these new creative ways of thinking by writers on the left, such as David Harvey (2005, 2011) and Jean-Luc Nancy (2000), will face enormous, perhaps insurmountable, obstacles before they translate across to frontline practice.

The first task of adherents to critical social work must consist in militant opposition to the lie of neoliberal capitalism in all its manifestations, or what Agamben refers to as an 'I would prefer not to' strategic refusal (1999, see chapter 14). These dark times of neoliberal violence can be overcome and social workers can contribute to its downfall, connected, together and in solidarity with a fresh optimism. Each of us on the social work Left has this to do: *stand together in fraternal solidarity*. Jane Jacobs (1993) gives a feel for how we can imagine new forms of collective life:

> Imagine a large field in darkness. In the field, many fires are burning. They are of many sizes, some great, others small; some far apart, others dotted close together; some are brightening, some are slowly going out. Each fire, large or small, extends its radiance into the surrounding murk, and thus it carves out a space. But the space and the shape of that space exist only to the extent that the light from the fire creates it. The murk has no shape or pattern except where it is carved into the space by light.
>
> *(1993: 490)*

The metaphoric space defining the fires gives life in the murk. Life attracts life. The fires are places where people share, giving each other close-grained and homely support. The lights from the fires signify the commons. The conditions that make up the thing we call the 'life world' can only exist at all as a consequence of the gift of belonging-to-one-another. This is what theologians called the spirit of community – the *donum dei*. The gift that gives the relationship is the sense of the influx of each of us into each other. Or to be less elegiac, this communization of life is what Jean-Luc Nancy (2000) calls an essential sharing of the world which is foundational for a political ontology of reciprocity and kindness (Noys, 2011).

What new forms of collective life are possible and how will social work contribute to the conception and practice of new forms of life? Will social workers take part in a fresh demand for equality, justice and universal emancipation and be galvanised in a call to arms? What alternatives are available for a social work politics? The last words are left to Badiou (2010: 6) and we ask you to consider whether or not he is correct when claiming:

> *We know that communism is the right hypothesis*. All those who abandon this hypothesis immediately resign themselves to the market economy, to parliamentary democracy—the form of state suited to capitalism—and to the inevitable and 'natural' character of the most monstrous inequalities.

Such a critical social work will create a political and historical trajectory through understanding and reacting to the apparatus that produces exploitation, injustice and inequality. The overall strategic purpose is insurrection: that is, to undermine and sabotage the established social relationships of exploitation between people, places and issues, as well as to challenge the capitalist law and state systems of reward and punishment. This makes it possible to redefine and reconfigure what it means to be a militant political agent who pushes back against the repressive violence of the State and apparatus of capitalist greed and wealth accumulation.

Note

1 The Invisible Committee tells us that 'Constituent power names that monstrous piece of magic that turns the state into an entity that's never wrong'. That is why we propose instead the destituting power of insurrections: 'To destitute power is to deprive it of its foundation. That is precisely what insurrections do' (The Invisible Committee, 2014: 26).

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Part I

Historical, social and political influences

Welfare words, neoliberalism and critical social work

Paul Michael Garrett

Introduction

During a period of neoliberalism, there is an intense, yet often stealthy, endeavour to adjust or recalibrate the 'semantic order of things' (Brown, 2015: 27). As the late Doreen Massey (2015: 24) stated, this development impacts on the everydayness of life and mundane social interactions given that on 'trains and buses, and sometimes in hospitals and universities too', we have become customers, not passengers, patients or students. Here, a 'specific activity and relationship is erased by a general relationship of buying and selling that is given precedence over it' (Massey, 2015: 24). This observation also helps to illuminate the significance of the use of words within social and health care and the differing practices that particular words seek to trigger, promote and embed. Moreover, what I term welfare words *fit* within the wider economic and cultural patterning riven with gross social inequalities and complex forms of social marginality. Thinking more deeply, critically and *politically* about the incessant deployment of particular words within prevailing discourses and daily social work encounters may also lead to questioning what such words 'assume about a social totality or infrastructure, or the presumed characteristics of social actors' (Barrett, 1992: 202). Far from being an exercise in 'political correctness', the aspiration to delve deeper into how power relations operate through the language and culture of neoliberal capitalism should form a major component of critical and radical social work (Garrett, 2017a).

Welfare words, critical social work and social policy

Words change meaning over time and are never encountered in isolation. Our engagement with words invariably occurs 'within the flows of our socio-cultural practices' with meaning 'at least in part tied to the social world we inhabit' (Grimwood, 2016: 15). Yet, as Noel Timms, a psychiatric social worker and author, observed in the late 1960s, it is 'surprising' that his profession, 'largely dependent on language, should have paid so little attention to words and what it means to speak a language' (Gregory and Holloway, 2005: 38). Indeed, the usage of words shapes the way the profession communicates with itself, how it coalesces, marks out and sustains a distinctive rationality. Through language it is able to construct and maintain the domain, with words serving as the 'glue' helping it to stick into place. For example, words (such as 'assessment', 'risk'

and 'supervision') are integral to the training of social workers who learn to *think* within the conceptual parameters of the profession and to *talk the talk* (see also Wilson, 2016). This mimetic dimension − learning the *right* language, perceptions and dispositions − contributes to producing a certain social work identity and *style* (Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002). This is part of the process Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) refers to as attaining the 'feel for the game'. The game is acquired through experience and the 'good player, who is so to speak the game incarnate, does at every moment what the game requires' (Bourdieu, 1994: 63). This 'feel' is partly inculcated through prevailing names and descriptions helping to constitute the dominant forms of reasoning which become, in time, 'turned into second nature' (Bourdieu, 1994: 65).

This learning process can also be connected to the ways in which people engaging with social workers are classified. Bowker and Star (1999:10) maintain that a 'classification system' is a 'set of boxes (metaphorical or literal) into which things can be put to then do some kind of work − bureaucratic or knowledge production'. Such systems have, of course, been central to social work since its inception (Woodroofe, 1962). In the past, this was reflected in the naming practices and types of descriptive language used in depicting and 'fixing' a person in a 'case' file (Foucault, 1991). In more recent times, this form of activity is more likely to be undertaken using electronic templates (Garrett, 2005).

For social work to be operational, some forms of categorisation are inevitable if the day-to-day work is to be rendered *doable*. Yet the verbal categories that social workers use can promote 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 2000). 'Labels' as Schram (1995: 23) avows, 'operate as sources of power that serve to frame identities and interests. They predispose actors to treat the subjects in question in certain ways'. For example, the words 'client' or 'service user' are apt to connote and convey vague, even suppressed, notions of inferior, tainted or spoiled personhood. Moreover, there may be instances when categories and classifications used by practitioners − often situated within a matrix of ideas associated with particular forms of ostensibly 'scientific' and neutral 'expertise' − can result in oppressive ramifications for those targeted for intervention (Mayes and Horwitz, 2005). An example of how this process can occur is reflected in historical responses to 'unmarried mothers' in Ireland and elsewhere (Garrett, 2016a; 2017a). Experts, often straddling the boundaries between the applied social sciences and clerical or pastoral guidance, performed vital 'definitional labour' (Goffman, 1971) and charted what was deemed to be the most appropriate forms of intervention. Felix Biestek (1957: 25), an American Jesuit and one of the primary definers of what constituted the philosophical foundation for social work, observed that caseworkers 'have differed in their evaluation of the capacity of "unmarried mothers", as a group, to make sound decisions. Some feel that unmarried mothers are so damaged emotionally that they are incapable of arriving at a good decision themselves'.

Gregory and Holloway (2005) chart the history of social work in England and identify how the profession has evolved discursively. For example, in the early 1950s the terminology used to describe the subjects of intervention included the 'poor', 'needy', 'imbecile', 'problem family' and 'crippled family' (Gregory and Holloway, 2005: 42). As the decade moved on, however, the emphasis on a more clinical orientation and the influence of psychodynamic approaches gave rise to shifting characterizations such as the 'person', the 'client' (Gregory and Holloway, 2005: 42). Somewhat surprisingly, military metaphors − such as officers and duty − have continued to symbolically represent aspects of social workers' day-to-day engagement with the users of services (Beckett, 2003; see also Newberry-Koroluk, 2014). Chris Beckett (2003) proposes that the 'spoken language' of social work is a combination flowing from the dynamic interplay of three identifiable types: the 'sacred language' (reflected in the aspirational language embedded in the profession's codes of ethics and so on); the 'official language' (revealed in the language of the bureaucracy); the 'colloquial' language (used by practitioners in the everyday, more informal interactions with one another).

Within mainstream professional exchanges, 'social worker' and 'client'/'service user' are usually perceived as fixed and discrete categories despite the fact that during a single lifetime an individual may find themselves passing from one to the other or simultaneously inhabiting both categories. More generally, how the users of services are identified has been a continuing source of debate (Tropp, 1974; Heffernan, 2006; McLaughlin, 2009). However, within social work there is sometimes a certain naiveté about the extent to which changing the names of things (using anti-oppressive language for example) can change the world itself (Beckett, 2003: 627). Nevertheless, critical thinking and engagement remains 'incomplete without a significant element of language critique' because 'discourse, and in particular language' appears to carry considerable 'weight in the constitution and reproduction of the emergent form of global capitalism' (Fairclough and Graham, 2002: 187). Moreover, our 'unthinking' engagement in language can often appear to accept uncritically its ideological meanings (Holborow, 2015: 4).

If, therefore, we are to think about the role of language within social work, it is helpful to focus on welfare words. In order to explore this theme in a little more detail, it is useful to also briefly refer to what the late sociologist and literary theorist, Raymond Williams (1921–1988) called 'keywords'.

Keywords

Raymond Williams' *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* is one of the main inspirations for this critical focus on the words used in social work and related areas of activity. Initially published in 1976, Williams' 'slim, strangely addictive' volume included 110 'micro essays' on words which he perceived as significant in the mid-1970s and into the following decade (Beckett, 2014: 19). These included, for example, charity, communication, community, consumer, family, modern, society, technology, unemployment, welfare and work. These represented, for him, 'binding' words, 'significant, indicative words in certain forms of thought' (Williams, 1983: 15). Hence, they functioned, singularly and collectively, as the 'linguistic-ideological hubs of his time' (Holborow, 2015: 71; see also Fritsch *et al.*, 2016a). The book was subsequently republished, during the period of the Thatcher governments (1979–90), with an additional 21 words added in 1983 (Williams, 1983). In 2014, a third edition was published coinciding with the *Keywords: Art, Culture and Society in 1980s Britain* exhibition at the Tate Gallery.

The underlying orientation in Williams' *Keywords* is one maintaining that there is a need to analyse keywords in the social conditions in which they arise, circulate and are then apt to alter or have their meaning culturally and politically re-calibrated. Thus, he tended to place 'special emphasis on adversarial uses, as in the repeated phrase "there is then both controversy and complexity in the term"' (Durant, 2006: 12). According to Williams' perspective, words can be viewed as 'artillery to be purposefully aimed' (Durant, 2006: 12). Marie Moran (2015: 4), in her fascinating exploration of one particular keyword – identity – defines a keyword as 'not merely an important or fashionable word, but a key element of a wider social transformation, capturing, embodying and expressing new, historically and socially specific ways of thinking and acting'. Hence, to understand their meaningfulness and social weight, keywords cannot be 'separated from the cultural political economy of the capitalist societies in which they came to prominence' (Moran, 2015: 4). For example, terms such as welfare and welfare state are 'involved in drawing and redrawing the boundaries of state intervention' (Béland and Petersen, 2014: 3). Moreover, these, and other words and phrases, change over time 'as newer terms replace or supplement older ones' (Béland and Petersen, 2014: 3).

This focus on keywords is 'traceable back to late nineteenth-century semantics' (Durant, 2006: 5), but Williams injected a quizzical Leftist approach into his own project. As a Marxist,

he also voiced 'reservations about semantic and lexicographical work as a force for change' (Durant, 2006: 16–17). Whilst his work was foundational to the field of 'cultural studies', Williams remained a cultural *materialist* in that he believed meaningful social and economic change could never be prompted by words alone. This position anticipates, in some sense, later comments by Bourdieu (2000: 2), who chides those placing 'excessive confidence in the power of language'. For the French sociologist, this was a 'typical illusion' of many contemporary academics who regarded an 'academic commentary as a political act or the critique of texts as a feat of resistance, and experience revolutions in the order of words as radical revolutions in the order of things' (Bourdieu, 2000: 2).

Williams acknowledged, however, the power of ideas and culture in consolidating, or rendering more vulnerable to change, a given social order. Expressed somewhat differently, it would be wrong to reduce issues relating to social change to either materialist accounts laying emphasis on structures and the brute forces of history, or to entirely idealist explanations stressing the determining importance of ideas, agency and intentions.

In recent years, some of Williams' keywords have become less significant, whereas others have been reactivated or had their meanings significantly re-worked (see also Eagleton-Pierce, 2016). Many have been deployed by the political Right to try and win consent for socially retrogressive policies (Garrett, 2009; 2013; 2014; 2016b). Writing prior to the economic crash beginning in 2007, Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) refer to a 'new spirit' of capitalism more inclined, for example, to encompass words such as well-being and social justice. Post-crash, such a tendency has become even more marked and this is exemplified by the startlingly cynical speech made by Theresa May on becoming UK prime minister in July 2016. Having been part of an administration presiding over relentless austerity measures, she proudly declared her intention to 'fight against . . . burning injustice'. Even before May's intervention, other leading Conservatives had strategically committed themselves to tackling social injustice, as evinced by a number of the publications from the UK Centre for Social Justice (CSJ). Partly driven by the desire to claim some of the terrain historically inhabited by the social democratic centre-left, the social justice phrase has been harnessed, in fact, to the project of levering people into work. More expansively, under the 'interchangeable rubrics of "modernization", "reform", "democracy", "the West", "the international community", "human rights", "secularism", "globalization", and various others, we find nothing but an historical attempt at an unprecedented regression' (Badiou, 2012: 4). In this context, powerful organisations, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) continue to play a pivotal role in amplifying this lexicon. Moreover, often completely 'disregarding local traditions and cultures' the language used seeks to create 'super-uniformity' amongst nation states (Holborow, 2015: 106).

Importantly, it is neoliberalism, of course, which provides the economic and cultural context for the circulation of these words and the themes associated with them.

A welfare words approach

The word neoliberalism is frequently used in a casual way as 'shorthand for a prevailing dystopian zeitgeist' (Venugopal, 2015: 168). However, neoliberalism is an historically specific form of capital accumulation endeavouring to engineer a 'counter-revolution against welfare capitalism' (Fairclough and Graham, 2002: 221). Relatedly, we are *witnessing, experiencing* (and often seeking to *resist*) the wholesale 'extension of a basic feature of capitalist power relations present from the beginning: *class domination*' (Fleming, 2015: 29, original emphases). Reflecting neoliberalism's ascendancy as a financial and cultural force, 'social activity and exchange becomes judged

on their degree of conformity to market culture' with business thinking and language 'migrating to all social activities' (Holborow, 2015: 34–35).

Importantly, neoliberals have been the curators of neo-welfare with the main aspiration being to eradicate any of the more benign attributes associated with post-war welfare states. Within the EU in recent years, it has been Greece which has faced the most 'radical' experimentation in this regard. The Greek working class has been the target for a 'gigantic disciplining operation – a huge experiment in violent downward social mobility and neoliberal adjustment and restructuring' (Stavrakakis, 2013: 315). Emblematic in this respect, is the acronym 'PIIGS' (Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece and Spain), deployed, on one level, merely as a shorthand for the EU's most indebted national economies toward the end of the 2000s, on the other as an insidiously dehumanising metaphor, justifying the use of large number of disenfranchised citizens, as 'guinea pigs' in the EU neoliberal lab (Stavrakakis, 2013: 315).

Whilst acknowledging that welfare is configured differently in different national settings, I define welfare words as those words and phrases used by 'primary definers' (Hall *et al.*, 1978) to steer debates on welfare in favour of a neoliberal political, economic and cultural agenda. The circulation of such words and phrases potentially helps, therefore, to sustain and propel the social logic of capitalism in its current form (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). Although not always neoliberal in origin, these words are frequently pivotal in neoliberal narratives of social marginality. Gendered and racialised as well as classed, welfare words tend to predominantly concern groups lacking in economic capital or holding significant stocks of 'negative symbolic capital' (Bourdieu in Bourdieu *et al.*, 2002: 185).

The use of welfare words might be conceptualised in terms of what Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) refers to as the struggle to maintain hegemony and they are circulated and promoted by figures located within the state and/or particular fields of 'expertise'. The media play a significant role in amplifying, popularising and socially embedding these terms. Nestled within wider 'common sense' understandings, welfare words might also be interpreted as forming parts of a wider, politically distracting 'screen discourse' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2001: 4) deflecting attention from issues related to capitalism, economic exploitation and a differential distribution of power. Such words reflect – or mask – how the dominant order is constructed contributing to its constitution and consolidation. However, they can also, to varying degrees, be perceived as a repository into which 'different sets of actors can pour multifarious meanings, from the hegemonic to the counter-hegemonic' (Eagleton-Pierce, 2016: 144).

In this context, discourse refers to a constellation of interconnected statements, explanations and lines of reasoning functioning to define a given situation at particular historical junctures. Discourses operate within what Bourdieu calls 'fields' – such as social work – determining implicit rules of engagement and restricting what can be legitimately and 'appropriately' represented, said and done. Thus, a pervasive plethora of powerful discourses, whilst failing to extinguish the possibility of oppositional meanings, can contribute to the maintenance of what Gramsci might have called a neoliberal hegemony.

The aim of a welfare words approach is not, therefore, to determine what are 'good' and 'bad' words or what is the decontaminated, 'real' or 'authentic' meaning of the particular words examined. Worth quoting at length, Marnie Holborow (2015: 121) lucidly articulates that the prime critical purpose should be to try and:

> unpick the ideological content of any language emanating from the ruling class of a society . . . to identify the link between the language and the specific social world it seeks to represent, including its distortions of reality which have the potential to undermine its hegemony. To grasp how ideology is condensed in certain expressions, it is necessary

> to see language not as a discursive practice within its own constraints – an 'order of discourse' – but as an utterance which responds to a social order and is fragilely suspended at a social conjuncture.

Some words are polysemous connoting a multiplicity of meanings and are suggestive of a range of different interpretations. Words, as Terry Eagleton maintains, are 'pulled this way and that by competing social interests, inscribed from within and with a multiplicity of ideological accents' (in Holborow, 2015: 128). The key point to recognise is that welfare words can be perceived as focal to a struggle for meaning, where dominant forces seek to embed certain hegemonic understandings to serve their class interests.

Examples of welfare words

In my recent book *Welfare Words*, I focus on how, for example, **welfare dependency** is prone to infiltrate many of the exchanges which are central to social work and related fields. The aim is to explore *why* the stigmatising of the welfare/welfare benefits/welfare dependency constellation appears so politically and socially prominent at the present time. Similarly, I examine the word **underclass**: Kirk Mann (1994: 81) believes that there is little doubt that this word is an 'American invention' and he mentions a speech by Edward Kennedy (1932–2009) in 1978, in which he referred to this pejorative welfare word. The term was initially promoted by numerous US journalists in the 1980s (Katz, 1993). Particularly influential in disseminating the concept is also a short series of articles by Ken Auletta, appearing in the *New York Times* in 1981 (Welshman, 2013). In the UK, Dean and Taylor-Gooby neatly summarised that the underclass idea did not so much 'define the marginalised, but . . . marginalise those it defines' (in Welshman, 2013: 11). Scrutinising the definers, Bagguley and Mann claimed that 'perhaps the real dangerous class is not the underclass but those who have propagated the underclass concept' (in Welshman, 2013: 181). Now sustained by a 'whole journalistic paraphernalia of menacing alterity' (Badiou, 2002: 27), the underclass has been to the fore in debates on the London 'riots' of 2011 and, more widely, on the future of welfare. Furthermore, there is a range of other derogatory labels which have been used, throughout history, to label and regulate the poor and the marginalised with the latest addition being the notion of Troubled Families.

Social ex/inclusion can likewise by examined in a critical way. Twenty years ago, Washington and Paylor (1998: 335) argued that 'the developing usage of the concept of social exclusion offers social work an opportunity to establish a professional focus which can be used in practice throughout the member states of the European Union'. By the 'turn of the century, social exclusion had become a Third Way buzzword in the UK' (Silver, 2010: 189). Subsequently, social ex/inclusion became 'diffused through international policy networks' particularly within Europe and, more specifically, the European Union (Béland and Petersen, 2014: 143).

Early intervention is a phrase carrying 'such an overwhelming, *a priori* correctness' (Featherstone *et al.*, 2014: 1737) that it appears beyond question. However, key questions relating to the current and seemingly omnipresent fixation with this phrase and practice include: What may be the assumptions underpinning early intervention? What roles are mothers particularly expected to play within a conceptual framework in which early intervention is increasingly to the fore?

Resilience, originating from the Latin *resilio* means 'to jump back' (Mohaupt, 2009: 63). Today, resilience is a prominent welfare word within the 'self-help', 'life skills' and 'coaching' book market. More broadly, the attribute of resilience is usually presented as a vital attribute to

add to the kitbag of hardened individual subjects intent on achieving the required psychological fitness for the rigours of neoliberalism's relentless and unending competition. Nevertheless, the promiscuous and mobile discourse pivoting on resilience has largely escaped critical scrutiny within social work and social policy and has far too swiftly become part of its 'common sense'. Hence, it can appear self-evident, established, and settled once and for all that resilience furnishes a convincing conceptual framework for thinking about, for example, social work interventions with a range of client groups. Relatedly, most studies looking through a resilience optic fail to look more closely at a range of other welfare words and phrases present in the same discursive orbit.

The journalist, Madeleine Bunting (2016: 23) avows that **care** is

> a small word, so pervasive and overloaded with meanings that its significance has often been easy to overlook. It's the care given by parents that nurtures us into adulthood, and it's the care given by others that supports us in old age and as we die; and in-between, care is the oft overlooked scaffolding of our lives, on which wellbeing and daily life depend.

Care is a welfare word which has a 'warm and loving quality to it, and it is difficult to wholly detach it from this halo effect. Simply to describe work as carework takes it into a special realm of value' (Twigg, 2000: 393). Care is central within a range of discourses impinging on social work and social policy in connection to, for example, the evolution of community care, the long-term care of the increasing proportions of older people, the treatment of children and young people in the public care system and debates about the recognition of unpaid carers. Furthermore, 'self-care', a notion so prominent within social work and similar 'caring' professions, is often mobilised to promote 'neoliberal objectives to dismantle public welfare resources and shift responsibility for care onto individual citizens' (Ward, 2015). All these issues and themes focus 'on what care means, its uses and abuses, what it costs, how it is supported, how it is delivered, and by whom' (Williams, 2005: 471). Underpinning a range of these issues are complex factors, and more abstract considerations related to the use of time and who is empowered to organise its distribution across a multiplicity of care locations. Current strains on care are often reflected in the notion that that is a 'crisis of care', is not 'accidental', but has 'deep systemic roots in the structure of our social order' (Fraser, 2016: 100).

The contemporary policy fixation with **child adoption** entails risks that many parents – anxious about their children being 'put up for adoption' – may be alienated and deterred from approaching local social services for family support. The political centrality of adoption might also lead to a further diminution in such services. More generally, it is apparent that both domestic and inter-country adoption has to be situated in the context of neoliberal economic and cultural practices. Child adoption lies at the intersection of a range of converging issues rooted in social divisions and cleavages associated with social class, 'race' and ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender roles, age, (dis)ability and, in the case of ICA (inter-country adoption), neo-colonialism.

Conceptual insights enabling a better comprehension of welfare words, such as these, are provided by a number of European thinkers who are all, to differing degrees, in dialogue with Marx: Antonio Gramsci, Pierre Bourdieu, Loïc Wacquant, the Autonomist Marxist tradition and Jacques Rancière. Each of them, using different analytical optics, furnishes conceptualisations helping us to account for the prominence of particular welfare words. These theorists alert us to the more encompassing economic, political and cultural context which facilitates the *flow* of these words. This is not, however, to argue that they deploy crude single-axis frameworks and are entirely unattuned to overlapping structures of domination. Some welfare words cannot be critically explored without referring to ideas relating to gender and mothering (e.g.

underclass, early intervention, care and adoption) and 'race' and racialisation (e.g. underclass and adoption) as well as class. Many welfare words also touch on issues related to age and generation: for example, care is connected to the notion that there is a crisis attributable to an 'ageing population'; a lacuna is present in discourses on child adoption in that the voices of children themselves rarely feature.

As Durant (2008: 123) concedes, in his discussion on Williams' choice of keywords, the issue of 'selection, inclusion and exclusion of candidate "keywords" . . . is as delicate, or awkward, now as it was then'. Having said this, the welfare words and phrases I have mentioned are, to differing degrees, ubiquitous within social work and related fields and their usage provides insights into economic and cultural tensions and wider contextual 'social changes' (Voloshinov, 1973: 19). Some of these words and phrases also seem to blend into each other, forming a deeply ideological mosaic of mutually reinforcing 'common sense' narratives (Hoare and Nowell Smith, 2005).

Clearly, a range of entirely different words and phrases could be selected and readers will, no doubt, have their own thoughts and suggestions. For example, increasingly to the fore in what Bourdieu and Wacquant (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2001: 2) term the neoliberal 'vulgate', are words such as therapy, happiness and mindfulness. It is also clear that some words, such as 'prevention' are significant. In the area of social work with children and families, this word is increasingly harnessed to radicalisation and is reflected in worries about a conflationary rhetorical logic linking, for example, the Troubled Families Programme with notions of 'terror' and 'radicalisation' (Stanley and Guru, 2015; McKendrick and Finch, 2016). The words 'entrepreneur' or 'social entrepreneur' are becoming omnipresent and crossing the traditional divide between political Left and Right. Symptomatic of this trend, John McDonnell (2016), as UK Labour Shadow Chancellor, proclaimed the commitment of a future Labour government to 'create an entrepreneurial state that works with the wealth creators'. Conversely, as we have seen, traditionally progressive phrases such as 'social justice' have been incorporated within the political discourse of the ruling Conservative Party in the UK, being disassembled and reassembled in such a way as to eliminate all semblance of radical Leftist intent.

Rhetorically recalibrated neoliberalism

At this current conjuncture, it appears that neoliberalism is being rhetorically recalibrated. In the UK, it has been maintained that the Brexit vote and the associated 'ructions of 2016 may signal a pivot from punitive to compensatory neoliberalism, as spending cuts and monetary policy reach their political and economic limits' (Watkins, 2016: 27). At the time of writing, shifts may be detectable in the tonality of policy – and the vocabulary used – as this relates to questions pertaining to welfare provision and, more broadly, the role of government. Enunciating the 'new centre ground' of British politics at the Conservative Party conference in October 2016, UK prime minister May (2016) contended that this was the time for

> a new approach that says while government does not have all the answers, government can and should be a force for good; that the state exists to provide what individual people, communities and markets cannot; and that we should employ the power of government for the good of the people.

If this politics was pursued it would serve to maintain and nurture a 'country of decency, fairness and quiet resolve . . . a Great Meritocracy' (May, 2016). This rhetorical positioning is partly a reaction to challenges from the nationalist Right, within her own party and UKIP,

and the insurgent Left within the Labour Party. However, in some respects, this perspective was foreshadowed by some of the narratives circulating around 'inclusive capitalism' in 2014 (Carney, 2014). Such moves can be interpreted as part of more encompassing projects seeking to steer the leadership of the ruling bloc, generating consent amongst 'kindred and allied groups' (Gramsci in Hoare and Nowell Smith, 2005: 57–8). In the US, not entirely dissimilar shifts are detectable with the emergence of what Fraser ironically terms 'progressive' neoliberalism 'celebrating "diversity", meritocracy and "emancipation" while dismantling social protections and re-externalizing social reproduction. The result is not only to abandon defenceless populations to capital's predations, but also to redefine emancipation in market terms' (Fraser, 2016: 113). At the level of electoral politics, this form of neoliberalism was embodied, during the 2016 presidential election campaign, by the defeated Hillary Clinton: economically business-as-usual, hawkish overseas, but keen to pursue a liberal social agenda particularly in terms of issues pertaining to gender and sexuality.

Others, however, suggest that neoliberalism is being recalibrated in rather different ways with Davies (2016), for example, arguing that neoliberalism has passed through three stages: a form of 'combative' or insurgent neoliberalism (1979–89), followed by the 'normative' neoliberalism which began with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and culminated in the 'crash' of 2008. Since then, neoliberalism can be perceived as entering an unfinished 'punitive' phase in which debt and punishment becomes more prominent. Perhaps anticipating something of the 'spirit' of the rebarbative and erratic Trump administration, Davies (2016: 130) interprets this development as related to the evolution of a 'melancholic condition in which governments and societies unleash hatred and violence'. Moreover, integral to 'punitive' neoliberalism is the decline in mental health, and a public vocabulary inculcating self-blaming.

Welfare words, social work and critically disruptive thinking

Initially inspired by Raymond Williams, a welfare words approach to analysing social change, in and beyond our professions, acknowledges the importance of 'keyword-anchored theorising' (Wilson, 2016: 4). Indeed, there may be something of a resurgence of interest in this form of inquiry within social work, social policy and sociology literature (Eagleton-Pierce, 2016; Fritsch *et al.*, 2016a; Moran, 2015; Wilson, 2016). Partly in tune with the approach of Williams, Gramsci and Bourdieu, Fraser and Gordon stress the need to promote a 'critical political semantics' to discern how neoliberalism seeks to maintain domination across societies and within particular institutions and bureaucratic fields. Such critical vigilance is imperative, since 'unreflective' use of words might 'serve to enshrine certain interpretations of social life as authoritative and . . . obscure others', generally to the advantage of powerful groups in society and to the disadvantage of subordinate ones (Fraser and Gordon, 1997: 123).

Clearly, language does not 'produce the world as various strands of idealist philosophy have maintained; however, it does organize and delimit its objects' (Fritsch *et al.*, 2016b: 12). Safri and Ruccio (2013: 8) argue that such an exploration can provide a 'specific "interventionist" scholarship' exposing the political, ethical, and class stakes inherent to particular words. The approach discussed in this chapter seeks to *pull* and *stretch* a series of welfare words, to view them from different angles and to defamiliarise and disrupt their taken-for-granted meanings within mainstream social work. Words such as those mentioned earlier, and many more, constitute the 'linguistic habitus' (Hayward, 2007) of social workers, aiding them to attain what we have seen Bourdieu (1994: 9) refer to as the 'feel for the game'.

However, words are notably unstable and can always have their meanings overturned. As the Soviet linguist Valentin Voloshinov (1895–1936) (1973: 23) argued in the 1920s, the ruling

class strive to impart a dominant, hegemonic 'supraclass, eternal character' to particular words. Relatedly, Sanford Schram (1995: 21) argues that attempts to 'rename' can serve to progressively 'destabilize prevailing institutional practices' which may be harmful or damaging. Renaming can help 'denaturalize and delegitimate ascendant categories and constraints they place on political possibility' (Schram, 1995: 22), yet we also need to remain alert to how labels and keywords, even those aiming at a progressive re-framing, are constantly shifting and in flux because all 'terms are partial and incomplete characterizations, every new term can be invalidated as not capturing all that needs to be said about any topic' (Schram, 1995: 24). Similar points have more recently been made by Fritsch *et al.* (2016b, p. 3) who argue that 'purely nominal shifts are never enough' to resolve political problems (Fritsch *et al.*, 2016b: 3). Nevertheless, projects of re-signification and attempting to 'change the valuations assigned to particular terms' do have progressive utility (Fritsch *et al.*, 2016b: 14).

Conclusion

Ubiquitous welfare words and phrases can be regarded as 'tips of the iceberg', hinting at the concealed contours of a much larger phenomenon (Stubbs in Holborow, 2015: 116). Looking beneath the surface might continue to help us 'cultivate new habits of disruptive thinking', new modes of resistance and new political possibilities (Fritsch *et al.*, 2016b: 17). This chapter has, therefore, referred to a cluster of words which are omnipresent during this period when the trajectory of the neoliberal project is more edgily uncertain. These words, along with others not explored, condense various ideological and hegemonic themes at this historical conjuncture, amplifying the 'state of play' in fields such as social work. Attentiveness to such words is of the utmost importance because they can reflect how the dominant order is assembled; yet as they contribute to its constitution and consolidation, they can also become the focus of challenges to the status quo.

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Neoliberal relations of poverty and the welfare state

Sanford F. Schram

For years, poverty has been an intensely researched topic for welfare state analysts. Yet, it has most often been studied in individualistic terms, focused on detailing the characteristics of those living in poverty, including most especially estimating their population size and composition. Recent attempts have sought to change that by conceiving of poverty in relational terms, including most significantly the relationship of the poor to those who are more fortunate and in a position to affect their life chances. Among these persons in relation with the poor are state actors who are assigned responsibility to monitor, manage, surveil, and discipline welfare recipients to be market compliant actors. These neoliberal relations of poverty are in need of closer examination as the welfare state comes under pressure to integrate recipients into the market economy thereby overcoming their social exclusion while simultaneously reducing the state's burden for sustaining them. Comparative analysis across countries of these shifts in relations between the poor and their state managers point to the variegated ways nations are enacting neoliberal welfare policy reforms. Based on such comparative analysis, this chapter highlights moves toward progressive responses even as neoliberal pressures for market compliance remain ascendant.

For many, Donald Trump's ascension to the White House as the 45th President of the United States felt like an earth-shattering event. A woefully unqualified politician who has consistently been accused of lying, Trump increasingly came under scrutiny for his past as a shady real estate developer with questionable ties to Russian oligarchs and the Kremlin's own Vladimir Putin. Stranger than fiction, this horrifying reality included a profound contradiction. Trump ran for office to "Make America Great Again" by promising to "drain the swamp" of the Washington Establishment, but his cabinet and his policies once in office leaned heavily in favor of the corporate class that had dominated Washington politics for decades. While some commentators noted that Trump's opponent Hillary Clinton failed to mobilize support amongst ordinary people who felt increasingly marginalized by the changing political economy in an era of globalization, Trump's victory could hardly be seen as a repudiation of the political-economic power structure as it had evolved from the late 20th to early 21st century. Clinton was accused by Nancy Fraser (2017) and others as offering, at best, a tepid, pallid "progressive neoliberalism." By neoliberalism, the critics meant a turn away from the welfare state as a counter to the market, and by progressive, they meant efforts to include women, people of color, and those of diverse sexual and gender identities. A more inclusive neoliberalism did not resonate with many whites,

in particular, who felt increasingly marginalized, economically as well as socially and culturally in a globalizing and diversifying world. Trump might have been the beneficiary of people's growing resentment toward failed neoliberal policies that led to increased economic hardship, a widening gap between the rich and the poor and intensified anxiety about spreading social as well as economic precarity. Yet, Trump's administration proved to be but an intensification of those neoliberal trends.

In fact, Trump turned his focus at the end of his first year in office toward accelerating the ongoing neoliberal hollowing out of the welfare state, by starting the beast with massive tax cuts, thereby producing even more manufactured austerity that led to proposing unprecedented levels of draconian cuts in social welfare spending, all contrary to his campaign promises. Trump saw nothing to explain or apologize for, even as he himself faced indictment for lying about colluding with Russians in seeking to influence the 2016 election. Trump was a closet neoliberal, but it was covered over by the attention to the widening scandal regarding accusations of his involvement with the Russian state.

It is more meaningful to re-focus on Trump's neoliberalism and to place it in the broader context of a neoliberal era that has been ascendant ever since Ronald Reagan won entry to the White House in 1980. In particular, we need to understand the persistence of neoliberalism at the hands of political leaders like Trump who rail against it, even as they govern consistent with it. We need to understand how its structural roots make this contradiction all the more likely. Most especially we need to understand neoliberalism relationally, i.e., as both a cause and effect of socio-economic relations as structured by the relationship of the state to the market and vice versa. A good example for illustrating the relational character of neoliberalism is how it breeds growing inequality economically that then is used to create asymmetrical distribution of political resources for influencing public policy. This vicious cycle of neoliberal relations reinscribes the accelerating inequality in society that heightens mass resentment on the one hand while decreasing the chances that the state will be empowered to do anything about it on the other. Like the contradictions of Trump himself, the "neoliberal relations of poverty", as I am calling it, intensify until they achieve a breaking point. At that critical juncture, perhaps then, it will become possible to push past this debilitating political economy, as structured, and begin to move to something more equitable and just.

I try to pursue this line of inquiry in the following narrative. I do this by taking what a growing number of analysts call a relational approach. After defining what I mean by a relational approach, I define what I mean by neoliberalism, highlight how neoliberalism has worked to re-work the welfare state, and I have detailed its major consequences for ordinary people, both politically as well as economically. I finally turn to how we can best respond to address this situation.

Neoliberal relations of poverty

For too long, perhaps almost always, especially in the western world, and most especially in the United States, poverty and economic hardship more generally has been studied far too often individualistically. Researchers almost always have tended to focus on the individuals who are poor, what characteristics they have, and what is it about them as individuals that makes them poor, be it their personality, their values, their behavior, their racial or ethnic background (see Schram 1995). Class relations, the structure of power in society and other social structural and institutional constraints are far too often pushed in the background in the quest to study individuals in an empirical and ideally quantitatively measurable way. Researchers inevitably lose sight of the forest of broader contextual factors in order to focus on the trees of economically disadvantaged individuals. Yet, in recent years, a growing number of analysts have begun to

counteract this pull to positivism by emphasizing in particular a "relational" approach to the study of this topic (Emirbayer, 1997; Desmond and Emirbayer, 2009; Desmond, 2016; Elwood, Lawson and Sheppard, 2017; Lawson and Elwood, 2018).

A relational understanding of social phenomena has a longstanding place in modern social science literature reaching back at least to Chester Barnard in his *The Functions of the Executive* (1938) where he distinctively emphasized the cooperative and interpersonal foundations of organizations. Barnard's influence ranged widely over the subsequent years coming to include radical scholars of social movements like Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward (1977) in their theory of the power of "poor people's movements" stemming from the disruptive ability that comes with their withholding consent and compliance in relationship to the powerful who dominate them. Social formations like poverty or impoverishment or even being poor, as in a poor individual, build off and emerge out of dependent relationships, be those relationships psychological, social, political, or economic.

There are a variety of sources in actuality for the relational approaches that increasingly became popular in the social sciences in recent years (Fuhse, 2014). Some drew from the work of Norbert Elias (1939) who rejected the overly deterministic character of structuralism and the overly agentistic orientation of individualism. Elias influenced social theorists such as Charles Tilly (2001) to look for a more dynamic modeling of how social structures and individual choice-making interacted at psychological as well as sociological levels (Diani, 2004). This sort of relational thinking resonated with the thinking of influential theorists like Anthony Giddens (1986) in his theory of structuration and Pierre Bourdieu (1977) in his conceptualization of what he called "habitus." The relational approach has been prominent among Scandinavian scholars of the Nordic welfare state (Harrikari and Rauhala, 2016). It is increasingly influential in Europe more generally (Donati, 2014).

By a relational approach, therefore, I mean nothing more than to focus on this fundamental social fact. Social conditions in particular should not be studied strictly in terms of the individual. Instead, an individual's poverty or economic hardship should be understood not in terms of a person's personal characteristics, behavior and practices in and of themselves, independent of the underlying social relationships. Instead, a better understanding is achieved when we place that person in a broader socio-economic context that enables us to understand how relationships with others in a structured institutional setting affect what the individual can and cannot get to do that ends up producing that poverty or hardship.

A distinctive feature of relational approaches is how they change the way we conduct research. Matthew Desmond (2014) states that relational ethnography gives ontological primacy, not to groups or places, but to configurations of relations. The point of fieldwork becomes to describe a system of relations, "to show how things hang together in a web of mutual influence or support or interdependence or what have you, to describe the connections between the specifics the ethnographer knows by virtue of being there" (Becker, 1996: 56). The relational ethnographer designs "[s]trategies of quite literally following connections, associations, and putative relationships" (Marcus, 1998: 81), its proper object being "chains of interdependence" (Weber, 2001: 484; see also Beaud and Weber, 2003). Relational ethnography is not propelled by the logic of comparison, as is the multi-sited ethnography of sociology. It does not seek to understand if a certain group or community is peculiar vis-à-vis their counterparts in other contexts. It often does not seek to understand if a certain group or community is anything at all. Rather, it is "designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions [that come to support] the argument of the ethnography" (Marcus, 1998: 90). Most basically, a relational approach incorporates fully into the ethnographic sample at least two types of actors or agencies occupying different positions within the social space and bound together in a relationship of mutual dependence or struggle (Desmond, 2014).

A relational approach to the study of poverty has the great virtue of placing individual's condition, behavior and even beliefs in a broader context so as to better make sense of why people do what they do and believe what they believe. It helps us understand why it might be rational for poor people to make the "bad" choices they make (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2013). We can better understand how these allegedly bad choices are not really so much a product of some characteristics or propensity among poor people as individuals but more the result of their context and the relationships that serve to create and reinforce that context. My specific focus is on how we have moved over the last four decades, at least since the Reagan presidency, to a neoliberal set of relations that shape and structure poverty and inequality in the U.S.

A key feature of the general orientation of neoliberalism is responsibilization (Hacker, 2006) or the idea that we need to insist and enforce personal responsibility as much as possible in an age where elites manufacture austerity, starve the beast of government, hollow out the welfare state, insist on personal responsibility and then blame and punish the poor when they fail or are unable to effectively comply (Schram, 2015). The neoliberal relations of poverty are highly disciplinary. They end up blaming people as individuals for the relationships that put them in adverse circumstances and force them often to make bad decisions because their choices are so limited. It makes people seem like they do not want to do better, to plan for their future, etc., when in fact they simply cannot afford to.

With responsibilization, the neoliberal relations of poverty are masked and erased from consideration. We are encouraged to blame the poor for the poverty society imposes on them. Neoliberal relations of poverty operate by stealth. Under neoliberalism, it becomes all the more important to highlight and make these relationships explicit so that we do not allow the atrophying of consciousness to rationalize poverty today in hyper individualistic terms that only serve to reinscribe neoliberalism's insistence on personal responsibility as a rationalization for hollowing out the welfare state. Yet, in order to better understand these dynamics of the neoliberal relations of poverty, we need to first define neoliberalism, which I turn to in the next section.

Neoliberalism defined

In recent years, the effects of neoliberalism cut to the bone (Stiglitz, 2012). The Great Recession of 2008–9 was the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s. By the time its most devastating effects began receding in late 2012, and the economy's improvement became noticeable in 2013, many people were beginning to exhale a sigh of relief that things might return to normal after an extended period of massive hardship for individuals and families throughout the United States. Yet it seemed that a new normal was emerging where economic opportunity for most people was not quite what it once was. In this transformed economy, the wealthy become ever wealthier, while the middle class shrinks and people with lower incomes— the working class and poor—were being disciplined to be market-compliant actors in an economy that left them with dwindling opportunities for achieving a decent standard of living.

As if these negative trends were not enough, mainstream political discourse diverted attention away from growing economic inequality and precarity and instead focused on the alleged dangers of high levels of public debt. The resultant manufactured austerity did nothing but accelerate the trend whereby growing numbers of people who suffered diminished economic prospects were made all the more subject to disciplinary practices of the state that punished them for their failure to succeed in a transformed economy. These changes take place during a time of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is these days ascendant, continuing its rise during the years of the Reagan presidency. Neoliberalism is where there is increased emphasis on people practicing personal responsibility by applying economic logic to all forms of decision-making across a variety of spheres of life

(Schram, 2015). Neoliberalism disseminates economic rationality to be the touchstone not just for the market but for civil society and the state as well. Most dramatically it has led to wholesale revision in public policy in a number of domains to be more consistent with market logic in the name of better promoting market-compliant behavior by as much of the citizenry as possible. People are expected to practice personal responsibility by investing in their own human capital to make themselves less of a burden on society as a whole or face the consequences of the heightened disciplinary regime (Soss, Fording, and Schram, 2011). As a result, post–Great Recession, the return of ordinary capitalism provided a new neoliberal normal of growing inequality and dwindling economic opportunities for most Americans. Under neoliberalism, the state buttresses markets rather than counters them and inequality grows virtually unabated, as not a bug but rather as a feature of this latest iteration of the return to ordinary capitalism. The shift to a new normal of a neoliberalized economy was by no means spontaneous. Joseph Stiglitz has written that these trends post Great Recession are actually reflective of a long wave of state-induced economic transformation:

> For thirty years after World War II, America grew together—with growth in income in every segment, but with those at the bottom growing faster than those at the top. The country's fight for survival brought a new sense of unity, and that led to policies, like the GI Bill, that helped bring the country even closer together. But for the past thirty years, we've become increasingly a nation divided; not only has the top been growing the fastest, but the bottom has actually been declining. The last time inequality approached the alarming level we see today was in the years before the Great Depression. If we are to reverse these trends in inequality, we will have to reverse some of the policies that have helped make America the most economically divided developed country and, beyond that, to take further actions to lessen the inequalities that arise on their own from market forces.
>
> *(Stiglitz, 2012: 4–5)*

The new normal therefore was a long time in the making and public policy helped make it happen. The effects of the Great Recession have been serious indeed, but they are symptomatic of a larger economic restructuring where social welfare policies most significantly are revised to work consistently with the logic of the market rather than to counter it. This economic restructuring has not happened overnight, but instead, has come incrementally with economic downturns successively presenting opportunities to offload workers, outsource jobs, and rebuild firms so that they can more efficiently and profitably, if also more heartlessly, participate in the neoliberalization of the global economy. As a result, people on the bottom of the socio-economic ladder have increasingly been forced to try to survive on dwindling opportunities the transformed economy offers them or come under the purview of an increasingly disciplinary state.

While the new normal represented a break with the past, it also reflected continuity especially for selected marginalized populations, low-income African Americans in particular. In fact, the return of ordinary capitalism post the Great Recession has intensified pre-existing long-term negative trends in income, housing, health care, social welfare, and criminal justice, as well as overall well-being for many African Americans. A case could be made that these persistent racial disparities were not simply the result of failed public policies but that race itself was a critical constitutive ingredient in the ongoing rollout of a neoliberal paternalistic regime of poverty governance. Race facilitated the institution of policies designed to contain low-income populations and manage their poverty problems so that they did not become a burden for the rest of society. Further, those policies (from welfare-to-work to mass incarceration) help re-inscribe race as a marker of who is innocent and who is guilty, who is deserving and who is not. In other words, persistent racial disparities in quality-of-life indicators were not a failure of the neoliberal

paternalistic regime of poverty management but were instead its very raison d'etre, reflective of a systematic effort to exploit racial divisions as a way of justifying advanced marginality among low-income African Americans (and other people of color).

Thomas Piketty (2014) has suggested that the 1945–73 period that Stiglitz references (i.e., what is often called the "Great Compression"), when wages rose with economic growth and there was a reduction in inequality, was actually an anomaly in the history of capitalism. While African Americans and other racial and ethnic minorities did not benefit as much as whites during this period, for the bulk of Americans this was a distinctive time where, to turn a phrase, a rising tide was lifting most boats, if not all.

Yet on the basis of examining several hundred years of data across several countries, Piketty concludes that the normal course of affairs for ordinary capitalism is where the returns from capital exceed economic growth so as to concentrate wealth at the top and increase inequality. In other words, most often a rising tide lifts the boats of the well-off but not really anyone else. From this perspective, we have indeed, post the Great Recession, returned to the normal course of affairs for ordinary capitalism, where the economy grows, but so as to increase the concentration of wealth at the top. The aftermath of the Great Recession has included an acceleration of that trend since the mid-1970s with the economy growing to create more inequality by concentrating wealth at the uppermost top of the income distribution, to the point of producing a new Gilded Age of "patrimonial capitalism" where the returns from capital help ensure that inherited wealth is the main driver of this extreme inequality. Piketty calls for a global wealth tax as the only solution to the inevitability of increasing concentration of wealth at the top. This is surely a utopian gesture, as Piketty himself recognizes, for there is not even a governmental body in existence to collect this tax.

Piketty's analysis therefore has an air of inevitability, that obdurate impersonal economic forces will be sustaining the new normal long into the future. Yet as ordinary people of all backgrounds persist in struggling to come to grips with this new normal, we must ask whether it is inevitable that economic forces will continue to generate greater levels of inequality and whether the ordinary people are in fact powerless to respond politically.

In this sense neoliberalism is not just another phase of liberal capitalism, though it is that, it is still more than seamlessly the product of the market economy's evolution. It is not so economically determined and fated to be by market operations that inevitably concentrate wealth at a faster rate than overall growth as Piketty sometimes seems to suggest. Instead, the growing inequality of the neoliberal era is in large part the product of public policy. The period of the Great Compression was a time of what we call Keynesianism, named for the great economist John Maynard Keynes who promoted the idea that the state should serve as a counter to the market. Keynesian enacted what Karl Polanyi called the "double movement," where the state operated independently of the market to counter its ill effects and promote economic stability that could work for the benefit of ordinary people. The Great Compression was in no small part a result of the success of Keynesian policies. Yet, as Keynesianism began to fail in the 1980s, probably due to globalization that made it more difficult for the national government to counter a globalizing economy, people began to lose faith in the ability of government to implement Keynesian counter-cyclical policy effectively. This created an opening for conservatives to push for moving away from Keynesian policies that involved the heavy hand of the state.

Yet, given the deep path dependencies that came with people being accustomed to the state being there to regulate the economy and offer social protection from the vagaries of the market, rolling back big government was reduced largely to Reaganesque rhetoric, popular though it was even among Democrats such as Bill Clinton. So, in response, critics of Keynesianism had to move to Plan B: if you could not get rid of the welfare state, the next best thing was to neoliberalize it. Rather than go back to classical Adam Smithian laissez-faire market fundamentalism, instead

marketize the state. Keynesian made a sharp division between the market and the state; it had the state serve as an alternative to the market offering social protection, and an independent state regulated the market. Under neoliberalism, the state did not go away but instead it was marketized: erase the sharp distinction between the market and the state, blur the boundary between the market and the state to bring in market actors to run state operations along market lines consistent with market logic in order to better buttress rather than counter the market. Neoliberalism in this sense most critically is not so much about the market as it is about the state; it is about the marketization of the state in order to better support rather than counter markets. With these marching orders, state actors have over the last few decades insistently and persistently neoliberalized the state. With the neoliberalization of the state, the neoliberal relations of poverty get instigated via state policy. We see this no better when we look at social welfare policies.

Neoliberal welfare

The Keynesian welfare state that arose during the Great Compression provided social protection for those who were seen as deserving of public assistance given their inability to provide for themselves and their family due to unemployment, disability, retirement, death of a wage-earning spouse and other conditions (Schram, 2015). The welfare state was an alternative to the market. The welfare state still exists but under neoliberalism it is increasingly focused on disciplining recipients to be market compliant, by minimizing their time receiving public assistance and enhancing their motivation and ability to fit into the market's job structure. The welfare state buttresses rather than counters the market. It does this by reorganizing its own operations to run along market lines according to market logic (Soss, Fording and Schram, 2011). Social welfare programs are often run by for-profit providers, who face market competition (often simulated through performance-management accountability schemes), and who are incentivized to run their programs as cheaply as possible to make profit by moving recipients as quickly as possible off assistance and into the job market. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that providers have an entirely different orientation, where once recipients were the clients, now employers are the clients. This revised orientation underscores how neoliberalizing welfare programs, whether it is unemployment assistance, disability, or public assistance for the poor, is now more about buttressing the market rather than countering it.

Neoliberalism is most often seen as being about promoting market freedom and it is undoubtedly about enhancing the power of the market and the supremacy of market logic (Brown, 2015). Yet, the ongoing neoliberalization of the welfare state demonstrates that neoliberalism is critically about the state, even if it is the marketization of the state. Further, neoliberalism is most seen as emphasizing the freedom in market freedom, as in deregulation and reduced reliance on a hollowed-out welfare state. Yet, in-depth examination of the neoliberalization of welfare demonstrates that neoliberalism is also about disciplining people to be market compliant. The key to understanding this seeming contradiction is understanding the critical role in neoliberalism played by the term "responsibilization." Responsibilization implies a process rather than a condition. It is something that gets done rather than a pre-existing condition. With a shift to a neoliberal orientation, people are expected to be personally responsible by achieving their well-being via the market and relying on market logic as much as possible to make the economically right choices in all areas of their lives. In this way, they should be able to eliminate their need to rely on the state. Yet, when people fail to be able to be responsible on their own, the neoliberalized welfare state is increasingly expected to step in to discipline recipients to be market compliant. The social control dimensions of welfare that have historically always been there now are accentuated (Piven and Cloward, 1971).