



Welfare Conditionality

SANCTIONS, SUPPORT AND
BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Social Class, Urban Marginality and Narratives on the Ethics of UK Welfare Sanctions

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Urban relegation and class position

- To relegate is to send away or banish, taking the form of real or imagined consignment to distinctive socio-spatial formations (Wacquant, 2016)
- Relegation is a collective activity and a relation, driven by class position.

Disciplining the urban precariat

- Post-industrial precariat (Wacquant, 2016, 2008; Standing, 2011) and policies of urban abandonment, resulting in the spread and normalisation of social insecurity at the bottom of the class ladder
- ‘Punitive mode of regulation of poverty knitting restrictive ‘workfare’ and expansive ‘prisonfare’ into a single organisational and cultural mesh flung over problem territories and categories of the dualising metropolis’ (Wacquant, 2016, p. 1085)
- Class antagonisms and class hatreds- heightened in periods of economic crisis (Hancock and Mooney, 2013, p. 124).

Permutations of dishonour

- Neoliberal state increasingly redefines Beveridge's risks as matters of personal responsibility and insurance (Lea and Hallsworth, 2013)
- Convergence to foster diffidence and disidentification...and a spatial disgrace warps the perception and behaviour of operators... a noxious identity imposed from outside, (Wacquant, 2016, p. 1083)
- Sennett's (2006) 'spectre of uselessness'
- 'Permutations of dishonour' (Wacquant, 2013, p. 244).
- Philosophy of moral behaviourism and employ techniques of control including stigma, surveillance, punitive restrictions and graduated sanctions to 'correct' the conduct of their clients...'authoritarian therapeutism' (Wacquant, 2013, p. 249)

Urban marginality and state-craft

- There is a need to focus on institutional mechanisms that produce, reproduce and transform the network of positions (Wacquant, 2016, emphasis added)
- Linking changing forms of urban marginality with emerging modalities of state crafting (Wacquant 2016; 2009).
- Inculcate work-seeking attitudes, encouraging passivity and self-blame. Habituation to precarious low-wage labour.
- A centaur state (Wacquant, 2009, 2010) of increasing state penetration and control which presents 'a fearsome and frowning mug towards the lower class' (see also Lea and Hallsworth, 2013)
- 'Sunset of a disciplinary power whose ambition was to produce useful and docile subjects and dawn of a power of control based on banishment' (De Giorgi, 2006).

The field of bureaucracy

- Fracturing of class lines in United States ‘patrolled by agencies of social control increasingly staffed by middle-class blacks charged with overseeing their unruly lower-class brethren’ (Wacquant, 2016, p 1079).
- ‘Unleashing of a ‘diligent and belligerent penal bureaucracy’ (Wacquant, 2013, p248).
- Neoliberal forms of violence: ‘Ferocity comes to be succeeded by other forms of violence, new forms of bureaucratic domination and asceticism. Passionless, impersonal callousness...’ (Gouldner, 1981, p 418, quoted in Rodger, 2013, p. 90).

The field of bureaucracy

- Generates ‘a heavy imprint’ of discipline on welfare recipients (Marwell, 2016, p. 1097).
- ‘Mentalities transformed by their routine engagement with hostility, interpersonal threat and, too often, only the coercive arm of the state’ (Rodger, 2013, p. 97).

A critique

- We do not have enough knowledge about the pains of the daily lives of the 'precariat' (Measor, 2013), of 'those caught in the cracks and ditches of the new economic landscape' (Wacquant, 2009).
- The precariat is presented 'as one undifferentiated mass, their individual characteristics and differences ironed flat... a colourless uniform group, Lowery-like stick figures' (Measor, 2013, p. 133-135).

A critique

- A need for a further analysis of state structure and policy to the everyday operation of state programmes in neighbourhoods of relegation and the contradictions and unexpected spaces of encounters within them (Crane, 2016)
- The socioeconomic position of cultural groups...also involves cultural process from below, how for examples, individuals and groups identify themselves, the nature of their lifestyles, mind sets, values and routine activities'. (Stenson, 2013).

Leviathan, sovereignty and the duel

- Neoliberal Leviathan (Wacquant, 2013, p 243)
- Leviathan and the legitimacy of the sovereign and the social contract (Flint, 2015)
- Abstract intimidation (Foucault, 1977, p 87)
- 'Judges of normality...upon which the reign of the normative is based' (Foucault, 1977, p 304)

Leviathan, sovereignty and the duel

- The element of the duel and the importance of individualisation: ‘Individualisation, calibrated signs and modulation to the defendant himself, to his nature, to his way of life and his attitude of mind, to his part, to the quality, and not intention of his will’ Foucault, 1977, p 99).
- ‘Epic proportions [for] the tiny struggle that passed unperceived in everyday life’ (Foucault, 1977, p 67), always ‘space[s] of tolerance...and a necessary illegality’ (ibid, p 82-32).
- The framing of practice as interventions in the social world and its inclusionary as well as exclusionary dimensions and complex and ambiguous class dynamics (Flint, 2012; Crawford and Flint, 2016).

A research agenda

- State as splintered space of struggles over the selection, definition and treatment of social problems...not the spawn of a malevolent design, but the result of the gradual and partial convergence of battles (Wacquant, 2013, p. 253).
- How emergent arrangements actually manufacture the consent of city residents and the specific relational dynamics within this (Marwell, 2016)

The research study

- *Welfare Conditionality: Sanctions, Support and Behaviour Change* (ESRC), 2013-2018:
<http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/>
- 44 key informant interviews, 24 practitioner focus groups, 3 waves of interviews with 480 welfare users in 10 cities in England and Scotland
- This paper based on: 2 practitioner focus groups, 4 key informant interviews and interviews with 40 individuals subject to anti-social behaviour-related interventions
- See: <http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/WelCond-findings-anti-social-behaviour-May16.pdf>

Members of the precariat

- Engaged in hotel work, labouring, car mechanics, voluntary work etc.

“I used to work in hotels doing waiting on silver service. I’ve done all kinds of work, do you know what I mean, all kinds. Whatever job come up I’d take really. Mostly factory work. Just boring work really. No skills in it.” WSU- MA-KJ-040a.

“Any job I’d do. Any job. As long as I know it’s a permanent job. Not one of these zero hour contract things, because I don’t want to take a job and not afford where I’m living now and ends up back on the streets.” WSU- MA-KJ-040a.

Districts of marginalisation?

- Contrast between the aspatial (the letter, computer), the clinic (Job Centres) for employment benefit sanctions and the socio-spatial arena of the home and neighbourhood for anti-social behaviour interventions:

“The estate that I live on is a very, very, very small little estate at the side of the motorway, and it’s got a reputation for trouble, and I personally think that the housing don’t want to really be going on there.” WSU-MA-KJ-047a

“They’re trying to- well I think they’re trying to make it a nice place for people to live” WSU-MA-KJ-044a

Districts of marginalisation?

- Contrast between the aspatial (the letter, computer), the clinic (Job Centres) for employment benefit sanctions and the socio-spatial arena of the home and neighbourhood for anti-social behaviour interventions:

“They’re trying to get the down-and-outs, and everyone else like for- you know like people that haven’t got much or something like that. It looks to me like they’re trying to get all them out for better people to come in ...Like posh people. Like people that are not like on benefits...” WSU-MA-KJ-041a

“...I’m having to go back to fucking supervised consumption in a chemist and that pisses me off that because it’s embarrassing.”
WSU- MA-KJ-040a.

The politics of the centaur state

“Now don’t get me wrong, I’m an equal opportunity person, help everyone. But at the end of the day the Government should have helped us English people first, who were here, then started letting people in.” WSU-MA-KJ-047a

“My grandad fought in the war, do you know what I’m saying, and there’s people here like in front of me and her who are in a hostel? I’m not saying, just come over here, come over here, been here four days and got a brand new house and we got thrown back on the streets, fit for the streets, not from this country, in front of my face. How disgusting is that? My grandad fought for this country are you with me? It’s a joke...” WSU-MA-KJ-049a

The politics of the centaur state

“The government who run this country, they sit there drinking wine every night with steak and that”. WSU-MA-KJ-047

“I wish they’d get their finger out and realise that there are people that want to get on with their lives, not people that just want to sit there and get their new pram or their buggy or whatever.” WSU-ED-SJ-028a

The politics of the centaur state

“They’re treating people like - wrong. They’re trying to tell you there’s job about there for everybody. If there were why are they at the Jobcentres? Why are people signing on? There’s not jobs for everybody.” WSU-SH-JF-001A#1

“Sorry, to me they are paying out all this money for this company to come in. On I don’t like to get into politics. I really don’t because it makes me mad.” WSU-BR-JM-021A.

Encounters with the centaur state

“They don’t care what they do, do you know what I mean? All it is they have to have so many sanctioned every week. That’s just another tick for them, isn’t it? It’s wrong, they shouldn’t sanction people unless that person has robbed the money from the dole somehow.” WSU- MA-KJ-040a.

“Well I think when you suffer from a mental illness you become more vulnerable really. There is a sense of vulnerability about it all and they just seem so cold and horrible people. I don’t particularly like them to be honest with you.” WSU-GL-AS-026a.

Encounters with the centaur state

“...Well I don’t sign on anymore because they can’t be bothered to help me at the Jobcentre. I don’t know why they get paid because I say. ‘Oh the government has mentioned something in the paper’. ‘Oh we can’t be bothered to look at that...and it was ‘sign here, bugger off’ WSU-LO-KJ-029a.

“No wonder they have about 30 security guards in every Jobcentre...I’m surprised they don’t get stabbed or something.” WSU-LO-KJ-029a

“A lot of them sanction you and on the other end are stuck up gits, yes, who’ve got more than enough money, yes, and proper posh and they’re just out to think why should they get free money of the government?.” WSU-SH-EB-013a.

The Duel: contract and consent

“I don’t want everything my way, do you know what I mean? There has to be rules, course there does, do you know what I mean? There has to be give and take.” WSU- MA-KJ-040a.

“I’m willing to change, me. I’m willing to put in what they’re willing to put in, do you know what I mean? It’s not all give and take, it’s not all just take, take, take, it’s got to be a bit of give and take, do you know what I mean? You can’t just take out of the system and expect not to put anything back in ourselves, do you know what I mean? I’ve got to do my part in upholding what I agree to do basically, and I do, so you know what I mean?” WSU- MA-KJ-040a.

The Duel: contract and consent

“You’ve got to stick to some things. People are offering to help you. It’s not for nothing...it doesn’t work like that.” WSU-SH-EB-024a

“Yes, because otherwise you do get people that just try and cheat the benefit.” WSU-PE-JM-004a

“I can understand government, why they do it because there’s a lot of lazy people around. If someone’s just chucking money at you for just signing your name, then people are going to do that all the time.” WSU-SH-EB-010a

The Duel: contract and consent

“It’s government’s way of giving you a kick up the arse for being lazy.” WSU-SH-EB-010a

“It’s more for people’s safety and peace of mind and whatever. And sort of restricting that person as well, do you know what I mean? Because if someone’s out of control and chaotic and their lifestyle’s that way as well, it’s not fair to put it on to other people. Because I would have gone nuts if I- if I was my neighbour, in that time, I wouldn’t have tolerated what my neighbours tolerated at all. Because my behaviour was diabolical.” WSU-BR-AS-007a

Nuanced perceptions on sanctions

“I think it varies from person to person really doesn't it? Some people work well when they're pushed, some people are forced to do it when they're pushed to do it. So I understand that, where other might sort of close up a bit when they feel that much pressure.” WSU-MA-KJ-032a

“So I suppose it does help when you force relationship.” WSU-MA-KJ-032a

“You've got to stick to some things. People are offering to help you. It's not for nothing...it doesn't work like that.” WSU-SH-EB-024a

Nuanced perceptions on sanctions

“You’re learning something aren’t you? So I’m sure you are benefitting from it [having to attend classes to get meal voucher]...I don’t think they should sanction people because people are getting sanctioned for months and months and months aren’t they? I don’t think that’s fair.” WSU-SH-EB-011a

“It’s like hitting a nail with a hammer and slamming it down.”
WSU-MA-KJ-038a

Nuanced perceptions on sanctions

“Oh I could sing their praises all day. I really can sing their praises all day.” WSU-SH-EB-026a

“She wasn’t judgmental at all. Not like some people are.” WSU-SH-EB-026a

“Yes, it’s an agreement isn’t it? She’s helping me but obviously it’s a bit of respect as well.” WSU-SH-EB-024a

“It’s because obviously I’m her parent. That’s my job, not Marjorie’s job.” WSU-SH-EB-024a

Engineers of human conduct

“There is something there that around about if you can’t afford your rent and things like that, you might have to look at the things that you’re spending money on. Can you afford this top of the range Sky package or whatever?” KI02

“Part of the problem is that we’re now on to a third generation of kids who met in care, so where are the parenting skills? ...They don’t know how to parent children effectively because they don’t have those skills demonstrated to them when they were growing up. So, I think there is a much greater social aspect to it.”

Engineers of human conduct

“The phrase used to be poverty of aspiration. We have that I’m afraid in many of our communities and that is a big, big, feeder for anti-social behaviour.” “I think economic factors are massive as well and it would be impossible to ignore that, that’s huge, unemployment, youth unemployment, we are staring into the abyss, sad to say.”

“I don’t like phrases about conditionality and welfare and sanctioning the poorest in society because of the actions of their parents or the economic sector in which they were brought up...we can remove your house. We do that anyway, but what other welfare? I mean welfare is under attack at this moment in time, our child poverty figures are a national disgrace.”

Engineers of human conduct

“At the end of the day the sanctions don’t work because you’re dealing with chaotic people who have chaotic lifestyles who don’t know New York from New Year, you know. That’s just saying to people ‘Well, you’ve missed three appointments’. Some of them look at that poor guy that was found dead down south in his house that was a severely autistic man who was sanctioned beyond belief and death! That’s how effective sanctions are for me, as a civilisation we should be ashamed that that ever happened.” FG-JM-03

Ruins of the New Deal? Housing

“The language used by politicians...a lot of it sort of focused on a social housing tenancy being a benefit in itself.” KI01

“There’s something about a tenancy being a right in property, and so forth, that doesn’t sit comfortably with being regarded or described as a benefit for which you should be beholding. You should behave responsibly but there’s a tenancy agreement.” KI01

“This is part of the issue of the private rented sector is you get a lot of vulnerable people there, they’re people who fall through the cracks...the concern about linking conditionality with welfare when you’ve got the most vulnerable in society. ” FG-JM-03

A critique of fundamentals

“ I think conditionality starts from the premise that actually people are not really being honest and there’s some sort of sanction required to make people honest.

I think the government would say that they’re trying to create a kind of contract in which people have rights but responsibilities... I think there’s an atmosphere where there’s no longer a belief in institutionalised poverty. It’s the sense that people are poor because they have addictive or chaotic lifestyles and people are therefore responsible for their own situation and conditionality is a way of regulating or compelling them into a more orderly lifestyle which will be good for them.

A critique of fundamentals

I think in some areas there's a kind of machismo culture that there's such a strong pervasive feeling that these people are in a sense responsible for or in some way perpetrators of their own misery. There's a certain machismo culture that arises as to who is going to be able to force them or compel them more to come into line.

I think unintended consequences are that people engage even less. That people disappear from the welfare system.” KI24

Stigmatisation?

“A lot of them have such chaotic lives. I think a lot of them, it’s not intentional, they didn’t intend to end up in that way but they’ve reached a stage where maybe it’s mental health or drug use, alcohol use, everything has escalated to the point where their life is so chaotic, they can’t keep a handle in it without some support.” FG-AS-04

“I think people sometimes just genuinely can’t see any other way of being. It’s just that’s that bubble they are in...” FG-AS-04

Stigmatisation?

“If they’ve not been parenting, they’ve not been told how to run a household, then how they are expected to change their behaviour to match that?” FG-JM-03

“We all make really crap corporate parents, can I just tell you that? We should-every local authority in this land should be sued for its lack of parenting capacity ability.” FG-JM-03

Authoritarian therapeutism?

Dilemmas of practice

“God, are we really going to run this proof? Are we going to evict this family? Are we going to do this? Are we going to do that? That’s taxing enough and it’s troubling enough if you’ve got any sort of degree of social conscience...as a local authority lawyer were I charged with implementing some of the proposals that could emerge from something like this, I’d have to say no. I would seek alternative employment, quite frankly, than implement that sort of stuff.” FG-JM-03

Authoritarian therapeutism? Dilemmas of practice

“No, well, no one likes making children homeless. No one likes making anyone homeless.” FG-AS-04

“The whole approach is based on the welfare of the child. It is not based on sanction or anything else...The whole system deals with much broader problems than just criminal disorder and criminal behaviour, but it’s all based on welfare of the child and support.” KI03

Ethics and inclusionary impulses

“The ethical thing for me is the balance of doing all this stuff, all this enforcement stuff to an individual balanced against the needs of the community to go about their lives, have their quiet enjoyment of their homes, be able to go down the shops without being hassled for money all the time.” FG-AS-04

“It’s that qualified right thing, so that’s the kind of consideration is are we, yes, we’re going to be stopping people exercising these rights but are we doing it, so is it a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim and we’re doing it to prevent crime and disorder and not just because we don’t like them. FG-AS-04

Ethics and inclusionary impulses

“It’s quite a dysfunctional family at the moment and if you can try to help them become more functional, I don’t see how anyone could have any ethical problems against that really. FG-AS-04

“Quite a lot of them turn their lives around, don’t they?” FG-AS-04

“I think it’s [conditionality] been tied very closely to the social justice agenda to behaviour change for people and it’s seen as a very noble, not giving up on anybody...” KI03

“A key plank of social justice is life change through work and the idea is that actually it’s not socially just to leave people stuck on benefits and there is a way off of it.” KI03

Conclusions

- Evidence of precariat's encounters with the centaur state, framed within class antagonism and conflict, including socio-spatial dimensions
- But also an apparent 'manufacturing of consent, ambiguity and nuance'?
- A belligerent bureaucracy characterised by passionless and impersonal callousness?
- Understand Foucault's duel, individualisation, complexity and inclusionary as well as exclusionary mechanisms and ethicality within state-craft

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