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# **'Realizing the (troubled) family', 'crafting the neoliberal state'**

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## **Introduction**

At the heart of political and media responses to the English riots of 2011 was a concern about a 'slow motion moral collapse' (Cameron, 2011a). An 'underclass consensus' (Tyler, 2013) emerged at the time of the riots, and the Prime Minister, David Cameron, stated that 'the broken society is back at the top of my agenda' (Cameron, 2011a). Cameron also suggested that the question being asked 'over and over again' was 'Where are the parents?' (Cameron, 2011a). This concern resulted in the government establishing the Troubled Families Programme (TFP) in December 2011, tasked with realising the Prime Minister's ambition that the lives of the 120,000 most 'troubled families' in England would be 'turned round' by the end of the government's term of office.

This article examines the development of the 'troubled families' narrative which emerged from the riots, drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant. Their work is briefly discussed before the current concern about 'troubled families' is located in its wider historical and political context. The response to the riots and the emergence and development of the official concept of 'troubled families' is then examined. It is argued that the establishment and subsequent expansion of the Troubled Families Programme is part of a wider process of neo-liberal state-crafting being undertaken by the UK Coalition Government. The article pays particular attention to the centrality of 'the family' in this neoliberal restructuring and the reasons why the 'most marginalised families have become the focus of such intense political concern' (Morris *et al* 2013). It adds to the emerging literature on neoliberal forms of governing families in the UK at the current time, (Featherstone *et al* 2013, Butler 2014, Gillies, 2014) by providing a thick sociological perspective on neoliberalism (Wacquant 2010). The focus here is on developments in England, but the reach of neoliberalism and the trans-national concern about 'an

underclass' (Wacquant 2008), suggests that similar arrangements for governing families may emerge in other countries.

### **Bourdieu and Wacquant: 'realizing the family', 'crafting the state'**

Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant are two of the most influential sociologists of the last fifty years, who also collaborated on many occasions (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, Bourdieu *et al* 1994, Bourdieu *et al* 1999, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2001). Following Bourdieu's death in 2002, Wacquant has continued to develop and promote the work of his friend and mentor.

Bourdieu's work has been utilised extensively by scholars across a wide number of disciplines. Social work and social policy academics have arguably not engaged with Bourdieu's work to a similar degree (Garrett 2007a, Hastings and Matthews, 2014). Wacquant's work, including the concept of territorial stigmatisation, has been usefully deployed by sociologists and urban geographers in the UK (see, for example, Hancock & Mooney 2013), but much of his writing has also been neglected by social policy and social work researchers. This is despite a clear focus on new forms of state intervention on marginalised populations, (Wacquant 2008, 2009)

Bourdieu's work is too extensive to summarize here but it does provide us with a 'trove of conceptual tools' (Wacquant, 2005: 4) with which to interrogate contemporary political and social policy developments. He wrote extensively about *classification* and the special power of the state in *naming* things. In *Social Space and Symbolic Power*, he argues that *official* discourse performs three functions: firstly, it provides a diagnosis of a condition or a person; secondly, it states what should be done, in the form of orders, directives and prescriptions; and, thirdly, it provides 'authorized accounts', via documents such as police records or case files, of what people 'have actually done' (Bourdieu, 1989: 22). Discourses from the state, therefore, carry more weight than others because they are official and are often accepted as being authorized and legitimate accounts:

'The power to impose and to inculcate a vision of divisions, that is, the power to make visible and explicit social divisions that are implicit, is political power par

excellence. It is the power to make groups, to manipulate the objective structure of society. (Bourdieu, 1989: 23).

The power of this official discourse can create what Bourdieu termed a *doxa* (Bourdieu, 1977: 169), a situation where the arbitrary appears natural and where important issues remain unspoken and taken for granted, in contrast to an orthodoxy or a heterodoxy, where discussion and contestation takes place. In *On the family as a realized category*, Bourdieu highlights that official categorisations and policies serve to discursively and symbolically privilege certain types of family as more *natural* and acceptable than others (Bourdieu, 1996). Bourdieu argues that the concept of a preferred 'ideal' or heteronormative family type is not only taken for granted but is 'produced and reproduced with the guarantee of the state, it receives from the state at every moment the means to exist and persist' (1996: p25). He proposes that, as a result of this *power to name* and the *symbolic power* of official discourses, states are able to produce their own social problems (Bourdieu, 1994: 2). The concept of 'troubled families' provides us with such an *official* social problem, produced and reproduced by the state via the TFP. Bourdieu, however, did not view the state as a singular entity and wrote about the 'bureaucratic field' where struggles between different state actors played out (Bourdieu *et al* 1994). He also deployed the concept of left and right hands of the state to highlight tensions between the fiscally minded, technocratic centre - the 'right hand' and the social functions the social workers, teachers and youth workers of the 'left hand' (Bourdieu 1998).

Wacquant, in *Crafting the neoliberal state*, argues that the management of marginalised populations and the increasing state intervention in their lives should be understood as part of a 'thick sociological specification' (Wacquant, 2010: 200) of neo-liberalism. He proposes that the dominant, thin, conception of neo-liberalism as a free-market, small-state ideology requires expansion and an acknowledgement that more intensive and punitive interventions in the lives of marginalised groups are 'not a deviation from, but a constituent component of, the neo-liberal leviathan' (2010: 201). In examining the shaping of the neo-liberal state, he focuses primarily on the simultaneous withdrawal of welfare provision and the expansion of a proactive penal system, including the development of 'workfare' schemes.

The intention here, then, is to examine the development of the ‘troubled families’ discourse by drawing on Bourdieu’s extensive body of work and Wacquant’s work on neoliberal ‘state-crafting’ (Wacquant, 2010: 210), itself an extension of Bourdieu’s concept of ‘the bureaucratic field’ (Bourdieu 1994). Wacquant’s analysis of punitive penal and workfare schemes is extended to include consideration of the ‘persistent, assertive and challenging’ (DCLG, 2012a: 6) ‘family intervention’ approach upon which the TFP is predicated.

It should be acknowledged that the choice of Bourdieu and Wacquant to analyse the concept of ‘troubled families’ may be perceived as inappropriate by some. Neither Bourdieu nor Wacquant has written extensively about ‘the family’ (Bourdieu 1996 is an obvious exception), although Wacquant criticised Elijah Anderson’s portrayal of ‘street families’ and ‘decent families’ (Wacquant 2002) and has written at length about the alleged ‘underclass’ in the US (Wacquant 2008, 2009). Bourdieu’s portrayal of marginalised communities in *The Weight of the World* has also been subjected to criticism, with Skeggs arguing that his depiction presented the working classes as ‘racist, pathetic, useless and abused’ (Skeggs, 2004: 87) and Lawler suggesting that ‘It is clear that ‘misery’ is what Bourdieu and his team went looking for, and misery is what they found’ (Lawler, 2005: 434). The lack of a focus on gender in Bourdieu’s work has also been extensively critiqued (Adkins & Skeggs 2004). However, the focus here on *the activity of the state in constructing and mobilising the concept of ‘troubled families’* suggests that it is appropriate to utilise Bourdieusian work:

‘the true object of analysis ... is the social (or more precisely political) construction of reality as it appears to intuition and of its journalistic, bureaucratic and political representations, which help to produce effects which are indeed real, beginning with the political world, where they structure discussion’ (Bourdieu, 1999: 181).

A truly Bourdieusian analysis of the ‘troubled families’ *field* is beyond the scope of this paper. Such an approach would perhaps include the voices and views of practitioners and the families themselves and would also explore in greater detail some of the gender relations touched upon here which flow through the ‘troubled families’ *field* (Adkins 2004). The analysis here, however, focuses solely on the role of the ‘right hand’ of the state in realizing the construct of ‘troubled families’ and how this work aligns with the wider neoliberal crafting of the state taking place under the coalition government.

A methodology drawing on the Discourse Historical Approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (see Reisigl & Wodak 2009) was used to examine four key government texts on 'troubled families' and four speeches by the Prime Minister where 'troubled families' were mentioned. Government press releases relating to 'troubled families' were also analysed as were 'interventions' by Louise Casey, head of the Troubled Families Unit, including media interviews, conference speeches and a journal article. The portrayal of 'troubled families' discussed here is not the only one presented. There are competing and contradictory discourses which can be found in the 'troubled families' literature. It is, however, the contention that the representation of 'troubled families' discussed in this paper is the dominant discourse and the one most vigorously pursued by the government.

### **Families and 'the underclass' thesis**

Concepts similar to 'troubled families' are not a new phenomenon (Jordan 1974, Macnicol 1987, Morris, 1994, Welshman 2013). Macnicol has argued that

the concept of an inter-generational underclass displaying a high concentration of social problems – remaining outwith the boundaries of citizenship, alienated from cultural norms and stubbornly impervious to the normal incentives of the market, social work intervention or state welfare – has been reconstructed periodically over at least the past one hundred years' (Macnicol, 1987: 296).

He traces some of the continuities and changes between discussions of the 'residuum' in the 1880s'; the 'social problem group' of the 1930s'; the 'problem family' concept of the 1950s; the idea of a 'culture of poverty' in the 1960s; the 'cycle of deprivation' proposed by Sir Keith Joseph in the 1970s; and the 'underclass' proposed by Charles Murray in the 1980s (Macnicol, 1999 and see also Welshman, 2013 for a more detailed history, including the current interest in 'troubled families').

These reconstructions have occurred despite a large volume of social scientific research which has found little evidence of a distinct group of poor people with a different culture, separated from the rest of society. Rutter and Madge, for example, concluded a review of available literature by arguing that 'Problem families do not constitute a group which is qualitatively different from families in the general population' (Rutter & Madge, 1976: 255) and that 'stereotypes of *the* problem family' are to be distrusted' (Rutter & Madge, 1976:

256). It has been suggested more recently, that ‘any policy based on the idea that there are a group of ‘Problem Families’ who ‘transmit their Poverty/Deprivation’ to their children will inevitably fail, as this idea is a prejudice, unsupported by scientific evidence.’ (Gordon, 2011: 3)

Welshman highlights that there have been ‘continuities in these debates’ but also ‘differences ... reflecting the distinctive economic, political and social contexts of particular periods.’ (2013: xiv). The shift from ‘social exclusion’ to ‘troubled families’ from the early days of the New Labour administration in the late 1990s to the current period highlights the changed political context of the times. New Labour’s focus on ‘social exclusion’, initially tinged with a re-distributive discourse (Levitas, 1998), followed 18 years of Conservative government in the UK and countered the Thatcherite view that ‘there was no such thing as society’. Initiatives aimed at families, such as Sure Start, Working Family Tax Credits and pledges to tackle child poverty came under the umbrella of work to tackle social exclusion. Work which did possess a ‘family focus’ was, however, ‘particularly prominent in relation to services for families considered ‘at risk’ of social exclusion and intergenerational disadvantage’ (Clarke & Hughes, 2010: 527). This focus appeared to intensify towards the end of New Labour’s period in office with initiatives targeted at so-called ‘hard-to-reach’ or ‘anti-social’ families (Morris & Featherstone, 2010, Welshman, 2013), reflecting the ‘inclination of the Blair and Brown governments to make exaggerated claims for the success of their policies and to treat poverty and social exclusion as residual problems’ (Levitas, 2012: 5).

The *Respect* agenda, for example, launched in 2006, sought to ‘grip’ those families leading ‘problematic’ or ‘chaotic’ lives through the deployment of Family Intervention Projects, emphasising the apparent importance of ‘the family’ in tackling social problems (Morris & Featherstone 2010, Hughes 2010). In 2007, a Social Exclusion Task Force report identified 120,000 ‘at-risk’ families who were experiencing ‘multiple disadvantages’ such as maternal mental health, poor or overcrowded housing and low-income and/or deprivation (Morris *et al*, 2007). It has thus been argued that ‘New Labour created the conditions for the perfect storm of today: catch them early, focus on children and treat the feckless and risky’ (Featherstone *et al* 2013: 5) and that ‘a direct line of descent’ (Butler, 2014: 422) runs from New Labour to the Coalition government in this strand of family policy. The current focus on

'troubled families' has therefore coalesced around Labour's focus on the 'most disadvantaged', the demand for austerity following an 'excess of unthinking, impersonal welfare' (Cameron 2011b) and traditional Conservative interests in promoting 'the family' and reducing the size of the state.

Seven months after becoming Prime Minister, David Cameron gave a speech to the relationship advice charity *Relate*, in which he set out details of the government's 'family-friendly reform agenda' (Cameron 2010). It was in this speech that he also first used the 'troubled families' phrase in public. He argued that the previous government 'never got to grips with troubled families' (Cameron 2010). Cameron went on to say 'For years we've known that a relatively small number of troubled families are responsible for a large proportion of the problems in our society' and he set the 'ambition' to 'turn around every troubled family in the country' by the end of the current Parliament in 2015 (Cameron 2010). The language employed was consistent with a 'family friendly' approach, reflecting the new 'compassionate conservatism' approach favoured by Cameron. Following the riots that took place in towns and cities across England in August 2011, the tone changed.

### **The 2011 riots and 'the fightback'**

Two days after Mark Duggan was shot dead by police in Tottenham, North London on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2011, and following the refusal of the police to speak to members of his family, riots began in Tottenham which then spread to other parts of the country in the following days and nights. Tyler notes that, even as the riots were taking place, 'an underclass consensus' emerged in and from the responses of politicians and journalists, arguing that this consensus or *doxa* successfully rendered alternative forms of action or support as beyond question and helped to 'procure consent for a political backlash against Britain's poor' (Tyler 2013: 7 - see Wacquant, 2008: 35-36 for a similar analysis of the Los Angeles riots of 1992).

Attention crystallised on the role of parents in not 'controlling' their children (Bristow 2013) with both children and parents described as 'feral' (Hastings 2011, Phillips, 2011). De Benedictis (2012) highlights how discussions of 'feral parents' developed into concerns about 'lone mothers who were constructed as promiscuous and 'sexually immoral' and who 'deprive children of a 'normal' upbringing through a lack of the nuclear family' (De Benedictis, 2012: 12). Allen & Taylor contrast the dominant image of young men in hoodies



with the 'hyper-visibility of women' in the media commentaries and political discourse following the riots. They argue that

these debates were suffused with a long-standing narrative of troubled mothers which refuelled debates around welfare dependency and the (un)deserving poor in an age of austerity. Public discourses of feral youth and failing families elide and mask questions of structural disadvantage, individualising inequality as the outcome of personal 'ills' and individual pathologies rather than systematic material inequalities (Allen & Taylor, 2012: 5).

In his 'fightback' speech, four days after the last day of rioting, David Cameron wanted to 'be clear' that the riots were not about poverty, race, or government cuts. They were about 'people with a twisted moral code ... people with a complete absence of self-restraint' (Cameron 2011a). Cameron's speech identified a number of policy areas which would be reviewed by the government in response to the riots. These included issues as diverse as police reform, family structure and stability, local democracy, welfare reforms, planning reform and health and safety and human rights legislation (Cameron 2011a). This raft of policy announcements, backed by rhetoric about a welfare system that 'incites laziness, that excuses bad behaviour', the need to 'reclaim our streets from the thugs' and the need to 'be tough ... to score a clear line between right and wrong through the heart of this country' (Cameron 2011a) provides an exemplar of neoliberal '*state-crafting*': 'the correlative revamping of the perimeter missions, and capacities of public authority on the economic, social welfare and penal fronts' (Wacquant, 2010: 210).

Highlighting that a 'social fight-back' was needed, Cameron turned to the issue of families and parenting. He argued that the question being asked 'over and over again last week was 'where are the parents?' (Cameron 2011a). In his view, one only had to 'join the dots' to see that bad parenting was a primary cause of the riots:

I don't doubt that many of the rioters out last week have no father at home. Perhaps they come from one of the neighbourhoods where it's standard for children to have a mum and not a dad ... where it's normal for young men to grow up without a male role model, looking to the streets for their father figures, filled up with rage and anger (Cameron, 2011a).

The 'focusing event' (Birkland 1998) of the riots increased the need for 'more urgent action ... on the families that some people call 'problem', others call 'troubled'. Cameron argued that he had already wanted to see progress made on this issue but 'those plans were being held up by bureaucracy' (Cameron 2011a):

Now that the riots have happened I will make sure that we clear away the red tape and the bureaucratic wrangling, and put rocket boosters under this programme ... with a clear ambition that within the lifetime of this Parliament we will turn around the lives of 'the 120,000 most troubled families in the country' (Cameron, 2011a).

Within a matter of months the government had launched the TFP with Louise Casey, the former head of the previous government's Anti-Social Behaviour Unit and Respect Task Force, appointed to lead the programme.

### **The Troubled Families Programme**

Speaking at the launch of the TFP in December 2011, Cameron clarified what he meant by 'troubled families':

Officialdom might call them 'families with multiple disadvantages'. Some in the press might call them 'neighbours from hell'. Whatever you call them, we've known for years that a relatively small number of families are the source of a large proportion of the problems in society. Drug addiction. Alcohol abuse. Crime. A culture of disruption and irresponsibility that cascades through generations (Cameron, 2011b).

The link with New Labour's families with multiple disadvantages was established. Levitas highlighted that the label of 'troubled families' 'discursively collapses 'families with troubles' and 'troublesome families'' (Levitas, 2012: 5) and, in language similar to Tyler, that it was part of a 'discursive strategy' which was 'successful in feeding vindictive attitudes to the poor' (Levitas, 2012: 5). Cameron also highlighted the impact that 'troubled families' allegedly had on public services. It was estimated that the 120,000 'troubled families' cost the state £9 billion, with the vast majority of that amount spent on reactive services, responding to the families problems and the problems they caused for others. With the spectre of austerity looming large, Cameron argued that, as well as the moral imperative to help these families 'our heads tell us we can't afford to keep footing the monumental bills

for social failure' (Cameron 2011b), the challenge was to 'change completely the way government interacts with them; the way the state intervenes in their lives' (Cameron 2011b). He suggested that the approach of the previous government amounted to a form of 'compassionate cruelty' with families 'smothered in welfare' (Cameron 2011b) although Morris (2013) offers a more nuanced account of families experiences of multiple services.

Whilst Cameron noted the impact these families had on government finances and the quality of local services, no mention was made of the failure of government to address long-standing structural issues affecting these families, including poverty, poor quality employment and poor housing conditions. Similarly, no mention was made of the government's welfare reforms and austerity measures which would hit the poorest families hardest and see local services drastically reduced, unprecedented levels of sanctions imposed on recipients of benefits, and sharp increases in the numbers of people using food-banks. Recent analysis suggests that lone parent families and large families, two groups often linked with the 'troubled families' agenda, have been amongst the biggest losers from recent tax-benefit changes (De Agostini *et al* 2014) and it is the poorest local authority areas that have been hardest hit by cuts to local government (Innes & Tetlow 2015) and the government's welfare reforms (Beatty and Fothergill 2014).

Responsibility for delivering on the TFP was handed to Eric Pickles, the Communities Minister, the programme was located in the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and local authorities were invited to take part in the scheme on a Payment By Results (PBR) basis. All local authorities 'signed up' to the programme and were provided with an indicative number of 'troubled families' to work with in their area.

The TFP aimed to get 'workless' households back into employment, and tackling crime, anti-social behaviour and educational exclusion and truancy were also part of the attempt to 'turn around' the lives of the families involved. A fourth, local criteria could be applied to families who were 'a cause for concern' (DCLG, 2012b: 5) and who represented a 'high cost' to the public. The preferred way of working with these families was based on 'family intervention' principles where a single key worker would 'get to grips with' the families problems and provide 'a clear hard-headed recognition of how the family is going wrong - and what the family members themselves can do to take responsibility' (Cameron 2011b).

Family Intervention Projects (FIPs) began life as a single Intensive Family Support Project in Dundee in the late 1990s. The 'Dundee Model' (DCLG, 2012a: 11) attracted a lot of interest at the time and the previous Labour government 'rolled out' the family intervention approach to 53 local authorities in 2006 as part of its *Respect* agenda, which Louise Casey headed up, following positive findings from an evaluation of 6 pilot FIPs in England (Nixon *et al* 2006). The transfer of the approach from a single Scottish charity project to a national government programme included a name change to discursively prioritise *intervention* over *support* and the development of a 'twin track' approach where supportive measures were combined with the threat of sanctions for non-compliance in the projects (Nixon *et al* 2010). Despite the relatively short history of FIPs in their current form and the view of them as 'innovative' (DCLG, 2014), similarities between them and previous punitive family-based approaches in the Netherlands and Germany have been noted (Garrett 2007b). The emphasis on the relationship between a single key worker and the family, with a focus on practical, hands-on help is also reminiscent of the way that Family Service Units approached working with the 'problem families' of the 1950s (see Macnicol 1999 and Starkey 2000).

The DCLG report *Working with Troubled Families* identifies five 'family intervention factors' which underpinned effective family intervention practice:

- A dedicated worker, dedicated to a family
- Practical 'hands on' support
- A persistent, assertive and challenging approach
- Considering the family as a whole – gathering the intelligence
- Common purpose and agreed action

(DCLG, 2012a: 15)

A previous list of eight 'critical features' of the FIP model, identified by researchers at the National Centre for Social Research (White *et al*, 2008: 138-143), included similar factors but also attached importance to three features associated with resources. By the time the 'family intervention factors' were published by the government, 'high quality staff', 'staying involved for as long as necessary' and 'small caseloads', were no longer identified as 'key features of effective family intervention practice [which] stand out from the evidence' (DCLG, 2012a: 14). Bourdieu argued that the technocratic 'right hand' often sent the social

functions of the 'left hand' of the state , 'into the frontline to perform so-called 'social' work to compensate for the most flagrant inadequacies of the logic of the market, *without being given the means to really do their job*' (Bourdieu 1998: 2-3, emphasis added)

One area of consistency between the original FIPs and the current TFP is the positioning of mothers within these families. In a continuation of a historical concern about 'the feckless mother' (Starkey 2000), Hunter and Nixon noted that, even within 'de-gendered' ASB discourses, 'the failure of women to control the behaviour of members of their families is presented as a failure of parenting and citizenship' ensuring that they became the 'legitimate targets of state intervention' (Hunter & Nixon, 2009: 9). Continuing the 'hyper-visibility of women' following the riots, 15 of the 19 interviewees in the *Listening to Troubled Families* report were mothers (Casey 2012) and Casey has suggested that 'This is all about making sure the mum is in control of her household' (Casey, 2013a).

Another continuity is the way in which both FIPs and the TFP have been identified as a solution to the problem of traditional family services failing to 'get to grips' with 'troubled' or 'problem' families (Parr & Nixon, 2008: 165). Casey is, however, keen to see a different approach between FIPs and the TFP on the issue of scale. FIPs are described by her as 'boutique projects that were brilliant *but they didn't change the mainstream*' (HoC CoPA 2014: 27, emphasis added). She argues that 'a cultural revolution' is needed which will lead to 'public service transformation' (HoC CoPA 2014: 27), 'completely overhauling how local services work' and leaving 'a profound legacy in the form of a motivated, assertive flexible family intervention workforce' (Casey, 2013b: 461).

The course for the TFP was set. The answer to the 'problem' of 'troubled families' was similar to what Frost and Parton have called 'a more muscular interventionist stance' (cited in Morris and Featherstone, 2010: 560) – a new, efficient assertive and challenging form of intensive work with families and, more specifically, mothers, and the 'slanting of state activity from the social to the penal' amounting to a '*remasculinization of the state*' (Wacquant, 2010: 201 original emphasis). Slippages from this narrative have occurred, however, with Casey once remarking that 'the thing that is missing in all of this is love' and urging family workers to 'remember the humanity' (Aitkenhead, 2014). Wacquant stresses that neoliberal state-crafting does not 'proceed according to some master scheme

concocted by omniscient rulers' (Wacquant, 2010: 217). He instead argues that the building of a neo-liberal state is 'born of a mix of initial policy intent, sequential bureaucratic adjustment, and political trial and error and electoral profit seeking' (2010: 218).

The TFP has been largely welcomed by stakeholders and commentators, with a high degree of support and compliance across public, private and voluntary sectors. The DCLG has noted, for example, that 'the programme was voted the top government policy in a poll of local government chief executive officers' (DCLG, 2013a). Senior Labour MPs have endorsed the programme (Dugan, 2014) and a number of children's charities have also supported the development of the TFP. More widely, a number of journalists have written supportive articles about the programme (Cavanagh, 2012, Prynne, 2013), a small industry has arisen in 'troubled families' conferences and software companies have been quick to offer 'solutions' to data-sharing problems.

The *doxic* focus on families and their behaviour, supported by the symbolism of local authorities delivering the programme, amid the rhetoric of 'localism' and 'decentralisation', serves to close off discussion about the impact of wider structural issues and helps to mask the restructuring of the state advocated by Cameron and Casey. A narrow discourse on the 'dysfunctional' behaviour of families and the need for persistent, dedicated individuals – *family workers*, not *social workers* - to help them, diverts attention away from the impact of government austerity measures and welfare reforms. The success of the 'trouble families' *doxa* has resulted in the 'largely silent and unremarked upon resurrection of a cycle of deprivation theory, elision of a social justice agenda with tracking 'troubled families', an orgy of family blaming ... and an assault on state provision for families in the name of austerity' (Edwards and Gillies 2012: 431-432). It has also enabled the government to announce the 'massive expansion' of the 'troubled families' approach to target more families and different groups of people, before any evaluation has been published. An extra 400,000 'troubled families' have been identified (DCLG 2013b), to be supported by an extra £200 million. This announcement came just days before a Comprehensive Spending Review saw £2.1 billion cut from local authority budgets (Butler, 2013). In the 2014 Autumn Statement, the government announced that it would 'look to develop and extend the principles of the Troubled Families programme to other groups of people with complex

needs' (HM Treasury, 2014: 68) whilst also setting out measures to achieve a 'fair and affordable welfare system' (HM Treasury 2014: 58).

New, expanded criteria were announced for the extra 400,000 families on 19 August 2014, including families with 'children who need help' and where there are 'parents and children with a range of health problems'. Fifty 'Early Starter' local authorities who had made good progress in their work with 'troubled families' were announced as pioneers for the second phase. In reporting these announcements, at least four national newspapers (*The Sunday Times*, *The Daily Express*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Daily Mail*) again formed a consensus, agreeing that the expansion of the programme was proof of the existence of a growing 'underclass'. *The Sunday Times* estimated that this group was 'costing the taxpayer £30bn a year' (Hellen, 2014) and carried an interview with Louise Casey in which she said that 'These families are off the barometer in the number of problems they have' and that these families are the 'Worst in that they have the most problems, frankly they cause the most problems and frankly you wouldn't want to live with them' (Hellen, 2014).

## **Discussion**

The construction of 'troubled families' as the problem and the promotion of 'family intervention' as the solution, focuses attention on issues that take place *within* 'the family'. Bourdieu argued that 'In the social world, words make things, because they make the meaning and consensus on the existence and meaning of things, the common sense, the *doxa* accepted by all as self-evident' (Bourdieu 1996: 21). 'Common sense' pervades the 'troubled families' discourse and the widespread support for the concept from across the political spectrum ensures that alternative or competing arguments are easily crowded out or kept off the political agenda. The concept neatly deflects attention away from more complex (and costly to address) economic, environmental and structural conditions, concentrating instead on the need to 'get into the actual family, in their front room' (Casey 2013a) - the 'separate social universe' (Bourdieu, 1996: 20) of the family home - whilst simultaneously purporting to be delivering value to 'the taxpayer'.

The concern with and focus on 'family life' is therefore central to the neoliberal project and programme of austerity in the UK, with children and families viewed as worthy of state investment in order to ensure 'the production of competent neoliberal subjects' (Gillies,

2014: 218) while the concept of 'early intervention has come to occupy an increasingly ideological role in the context of contemporary austerity politics' (Gillies, 2014: 219). An example of this can be found in Cameron's speech on 'family values' which immediately preceded the announcement of the expanded TFP. On 18 August 2014, Cameron said

... in many ways, it's the family where true power lies. So for those of us who want to strengthen and improve society, there is no better way than strengthening families and strengthening the relationships on which families are built. Whether it's tackling crime and anti-social behaviour or debt and drug addiction; whether it's dealing with welfare dependency or improving education outcomes - *whatever the social issue we want to grasp - the answer should always begin with family* (Cameron 2014, emphasis added).

In October 2014, Eric Pickles stated that 'The Troubled Families programme demonstrates exactly what our long-term economic plan means for people', linking the governance of marginalised families behaviour with 'more economic stability for taxpayers, as we reduce the bills for social failure and get this country living within its means' (DCLG 2014).

Tyler's proposal that the 'underclass consensus' emerging from the riots of 2011 'should be understood as part of a much larger effort to procure consent for the rolling out of neo-liberal economic and social policies that 'punish the poor' (Tyler, 2013: 7) draws on the work of Loic Wacquant and his argument that a 'thick sociological specification' of neoliberalism is required. Such a specification breaks with the predominant account of neoliberalism as a 'free-market' ideology:

While it embraces laissez-faire at the top, releasing constraints on capital and expanding the life chances of the holders of economic and cultural capital, it is anything but laissez-faire at the bottom. Indeed, when it comes to handling the social turbulence generated by deregulation and to impressing the discipline of precarious labour, the new Leviathan reveals itself to be fiercely interventionist, bossy and pricey. The soft touch of libertarian proclivities favouring the upper class gives way to the hard edge of authoritarian oversight, as it endeavours to direct, nay, dictate the behaviour of the lower class (Wacquant 2010: 214)

There is a strong focus on the shift from 'welfare' to 'workfare' in the work of Wacquant and his emphasis is on the role of the police, the prison and the courts as 'core constituents' of



the *right hand* of the state, arguing that they should be seen as central to government programmes to deal with poverty and inequality. The coalition government's 'Work Programme' can be seen as an example of the shift from welfare to workfare and the government has also launched a work-related programme, *Support for Families with Multiple Problems*, which aims to 'support' families similar to those identified as 'troubled' with the aim of them 'making progress' towards or gaining employment. The omnipresence of 'austerity' and the wide-ranging and punitive response to the riots, leading into the development of the TFP, can be understood as an exercise in 'state-crafting' where the 'welfare state' is rolled back at the same time that interventionist programmes aimed at managing and containing 'troubled families' are rolled out. The 'feral parents', the 'rampaging teenagers' and the 'troubled families' discussed above are simply mobilized as the 'symbolic frames through which neo-liberal tenets are being actualised' (Wacquant, 2010: 213).

The (re)emergence of 'the family', in the UK at least, as a site for neoliberal welfare interventions, forces us to extend Wacquant's analysis of the *remasculinization of the state*, especially in light of comments made about 'mum' being in charge of her household and concerns about neighbourhoods where 'young men grow up without a male role model'. The *official* designation of the 'problem' as 'troubled families' (as opposed to a less specific 'class' or 'group' or 'race') allows for the solution to be framed as increased state (early) intervention into family life, via practitioners who 'think family', adopt a 'whole family' approach and can 'turn families around'. The TFP thus leads us to examine how the traditional social work functions of the *left hand*, as conceived by Bourdieu, are increasingly being shaped and controlled by the *right hand* of the state, what Wacquant calls the 'organizational coupling ... under the aegis of the same disciplinary philosophy of behaviourism and moralism' (Wacquant 2010: 202), despite the partial disguise of the localism agenda (see Garrett 2007a:371 for a discussion of the potential for the left hand to be a *punishing* hand).

## **Conclusion**

Services to families, like the criminal justice agencies mentioned by Wacquant, need to be central to our 'analysis of the redesign and deployment of government programs aimed at

coping with entrenched poverty and deepening disparities' (Wacquant 2010: 201). For whilst the TFP, with a strong emphasis on the inter-personal relationships between workers and families, is primarily delivered by local authority employed 'family workers', it should not be forgotten that it is a programme designed and developed by the *right hand of the state*, with nationally set criteria and outcomes monitored from Whitehall, and funded by a Payment-By-Results model which is linked to the government's 'long term economic plan'.

The labelling of families as 'troubled', the dubious 'counting' of them and the establishment of a specific programme, under the control of a high-profile civil servant all form part of the 'labour of representation' which the UK coalition government 'continually perform in order to impose their own vision of the world' (Bourdieu, 1991:234). The political capital expended in the concept, coupled with the rapid expansion of the 'family intervention' approach to include a further 400,000 families should provide evidence that the TFP was never intended to be a standalone, time-limited project, content to 'turn round' the lives of a relatively small number of troublesome families. Casey's insistence that 'This time around, there's no scope for boutique projects; the scope is to do full system change' (Chambers 2012) suggests that the intention was always more expansive than this. The Troubled Families Programme should therefore be viewed as an integral part of the aggressive neoliberal state-crafting which is taking place under the UK coalition government. The expansion of this primarily punitive, muscular interventionist programme suggests that more trouble lies ahead for marginalised and structurally disadvantaged families in the UK.

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