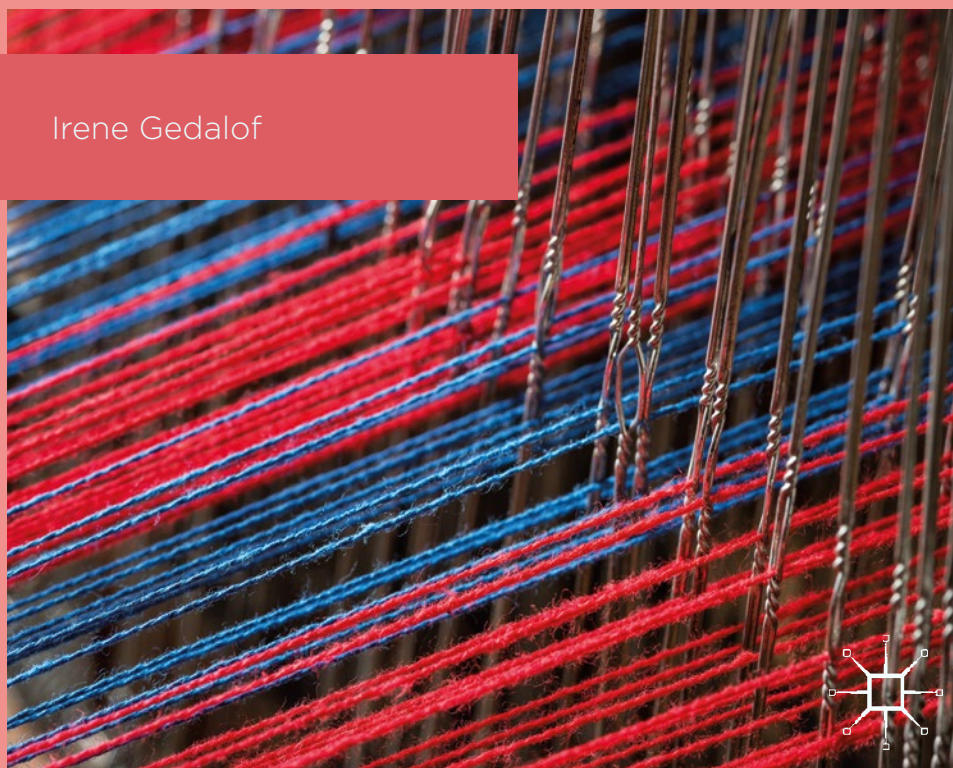


THINKING GENDER IN *TRANSNATIONAL* TIMES

# NARRATIVES OF DIFFERENCE IN AN AGE OF AUSTERITY

Irene Gedalof



# Thinking Gender in Transnational Times

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# Narratives of Difference in an Age of Austerity

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction: Narrative, Difference, Austerity</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Turning Around Equalities</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Doing the Right Thing: Welfare Reform Narratives and the Crafting of Consent</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Work Yourself Better: The Disabled Person as Benefit Scrounger</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Social Justice<sup>™(DWP)</sup> and the Trouble with Families</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Attachment and Disgust in Narratives of UK Family Migration Policy</b>	<b>141</b>



<b>7</b>	<b>Places of Sameness: Integration Policy, Localism and the Big Society</b>	169
<b>8</b>	<b>Postscript: November 2016</b>	203
	<b>Bibliography</b>	213
	<b>Index</b>	225

# 1

## Introduction: Narrative, Difference, Austerity

Only a few months after the 2010 election in the UK, which resulted in a coalition government between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, then Home Secretary and Equalities Minister Theresa May gave a speech in which she promised to ‘radically turn around the equalities agenda’ of the last Labour government (May 2010). At much the same time, Prime Minister David Cameron was reiterating the now-familiar claim that:

We are all in this together, and we will get through this together.

We will carry out Britain’s unavoidable deficit reduction plan in a way that strengthens and unites the country.

We are not doing this because we want to, driven by theory or ideology. We are doing this because we have to, driven by the urgent truth that unless we do, people will suffer and our national interest will suffer (Cameron 2010a).

Not long after, the new Work and Pensions Secretary, Iain Duncan Smith, introduced a Green Paper on welfare reform in which he promised:

We are going to end the culture of worklessness and dependency that has done so much harm to individuals, families and whole communities. Our

aim is to change forever a system that has undermined work and the aspiration that goes with it. (DWP 2010: 1)

At the Conservative Party's autumn conference after the election, Cameron also promised a new relationship between the state and the people, one in which localism and the 'Big Society' would prevail over the too-big state:

The old way of doing things: the high-spending, all controlling, heavy-handed state, those ideas were defeated. Statism lost ... society won [...] It's about government helping to build a nation of doers and go-getters, where people step forward not sit back, where people come together to make life better. (Cameron 2010b)

Turning around equalities, radical cutting of state expenditure, permanent change to the social security system, shrinking the remit of the state in order to build a nation of 'doers and go-getters'. An appeal to 'urgent truths' and to people who step forward not sit back. An assertion that austerity is not about making people suffer but rather about preventing even worse suffering. In linking these individual events and foregrounding these particular statements by government ministers, I am, of course, constructing a narrative, one that stitches major changes of approach to questions of (in)equality and social difference into the fabric of austerity. Narratives are always selective and partial, focusing on some aspects and not others, imposing a particular timeline, adopting a particular point of view and way of addressing their presumed audience. And narrative is my focus in this book, as I attempt to read policy documents for their narrative qualities, in order to unpick the ways in which gender, race, disability and other categories of social difference are positioned in a neo-liberal project of austerity. The policy documents I focus on stretch across the legislative agenda of the Coalition government; they include equality policy, welfare reform, disability policy, the 'Troubled Families' programme and the 'social justice strategy', the Big Society and the localism agenda, integration strategy and migration policy. My interest is not so much in evaluating the details and effects of particular government policies, which have already been the focus of many working in the social

policy field but, rather, in tracing the narrative logic and structure and the affective economies (Hemmings 2005; Ahmed 2004) evoked in political discourse which set the terms for broader social and political debates about difference and inequality, and which therefore work to produce some kind of social consensus that frames the public debate.

Even before the 2010 election, the UK Conservative party had announced that Britain would be entering an 'Age of Austerity' (Cameron 2009) in which a too-big, too-expensive and wrongly interventionist state would need to be rolled back in the interests of the people. Once the Conservative-led Coalition gained power, it embarked on a process of radical cutting of public sector service provision and welfare reform. As many have argued, these cuts have already had a disproportional effect on women, racialized minorities and the disabled, and promise further to retrench gendered, racialized, ableist and classed inequalities. As in much of the developed West, an ascendant conservative ideology accompanies and provides the rationale for these policies. Crucially, in the UK context, much of this discursive legitimation for public sector cuts directly involves a recasting of what is meant by equality, social justice and 'fairness', so that May's promise to turn around the equalities agenda becomes a constitutive part of the politics of austerity. While much important work has already been done to track the material effects of these changes, in this book, I am more interested in examining the underlying political grammar (Hemmings 2011) of narratives about (in)equality and difference that these policy developments produced. In particular, I am interested in tracing the production of a series of narratives about difference and sameness emerging across the Coalition legislative and policy agenda that suture gender, race, disability and their intersections into a legitimation of a neo-liberal approach to the state, social inequality and difference.

My sense, which I aim to investigate in this book, is that, when viewed in conjunction with each other, these narratives coalesced in troubling ways to constitute a shift in the discursive ground upon which issues of social difference and inequality have been problematized, and that this discursive shift will both affect the terms within which campaigns around specific equality issues are waged within the UK, and, more broadly, impact on how stories about equality and difference will be told, and what will be heard, in the contemporary context. Whether austerity remains the fram-

ing logic of government policy or not, I believe that the work these narratives have done will continue to influence mainstream politics in the UK for years to come. While my focus is on the UK, these narratives inevitably open out to transnational dynamics, most explicitly when they engage the ‘problems’ of immigration and integration. But they also more broadly reflect a cross-national discursive politics of neo-liberal austerity that has been taken up across most countries of the global North and, as such, their impact extends beyond the borders of the UK. Commitments to greater social justice on grounds of gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality and disability, fragile at the best of times in contemporary power formations, have been under assault worldwide in times of economic crisis and state austerity. The instrumental use of gender and sexual politics as markers of neo-liberal modernity (Brown 2006; Haritaworn et al. 2008) in order to further demonize and marginalize racialized populations, especially migrants and Muslims, is a feature of local–global entanglements transnationally.

In attempting to make sense of these complexities, I draw on the insights of feminist theories of intersectionality, especially Phoenix and Brah’s understanding of the concept of intersectionality as ‘signifying the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axes of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts’ (Phoenix and Brah 2004: 76). Understanding how social difference is narrated in austerity politics requires such an intersectional approach, because we can’t see what is happening with gender in contemporary power formations without also tracking configurations of class, race, disability, sexuality and the ways in which these come together. Neither can entanglements of the structural and the subjective ‘be separated out into discrete and pure strands’ (ibid.) if we want to understand the full scale and depth of the austerity project’s retrenchments in relation to social difference and inequality.

## Why Narrative

Much of the exasperation with austerity in critical commentary has turned around the ways in which the Coalition, and especially the senior Conservative partners in the Coalition, seemed able to control the

narrative surrounding the political choices being made. The ways in which a crisis in the banking/financial sector was turned into a crisis of too-much public spending on social policy and the welfare state, in which the dysfunction of the wealthy few was turned into the dysfunction of a too-intrusive state and the welfare-dependent scroungers it bred, has already been the object of much media and scholarly critical scrutiny. As Clarke and Newman put it, austerity:

has been ideologically reworked, at least in the UK, from an economic problem (how to ‘rescue’ the banks and restore market stability) to a political problem (how to allocate blame and responsibility for the crisis): a reworking that has focused on the unwieldy and expensive welfare state and public sector, rather than high risk strategies of banks, as the root cause of the crisis. This shape changing, we argue, is the result of intensive ideological work – work that we identify here through the image of the (political and financial) wizards attempting to find the alchemy that might turn disaster into triumph – the triumph being a new neo-liberal settlement. (2012: 300)

The focus on the national welfare state rather than the transnational financial sector as the source of crisis also shifts the terrain to one of challenging past senses of entitlement to social support, and therefore makes past efforts to address inequality part of the problem. As Bhattacharyya has argued, the austerity project aims to ‘to remake the terrain of the social in such a manner that previous agreements about equality and the reach of mutuality are under threat’ (2015: 1). Austerity, for her:

has been deployed as a way of suggesting that the misfortunes of some of the most disadvantaged arise as a result of previous attempts to address systematic inequality. At its most blunt, this is the suggestion that poverty has been overlooked due to an institutional focus on discrimination. (Ibid.: 6)

Noting the dissonances produced by failed promises on combating racism and delivering gender equality, and by the imperfections of the welfare system as it is, Bhattacharyya argues that ‘the explanatory narratives of austerity seem designed to respond to this dissonance and to recoup its consequences into the most atomised and mean-spirited vision of social relations’ (ibid.: 7).

In response to this apparent capture of the public debate, there has been no shortage of attempts to provide a corrective account. Economists such as Robert Reich, former US Labor Secretary, and Ha-Joon Chang have characterized the austerity narrative as ‘nonsense’ (O’Hara 2014) and argued that it is welfare myths, not costs, that are ‘spiralling out of control’ (Chang 2014). Feminist economists have pointed to the gendered underpinnings of a view of the economy that leads to austerity as the only possible response to the financial crisis (Pearson and Elson 2015; Griffin 2015). Other critical thinkers have asked why the basic logic of austerity has been accepted by so many working-class (Graeber 2014) and middle-class (Stanley 2014) people, and how shared values and experiences of different non-elite classes have been mobilized to elicit support for austerity policies. These kinds of reflections ask some important questions about narrative—what it is saying and what might be wrong about it, how a particular narrative fits into or contests wider discourses, how different classes or groups of people receive and negotiate with different narratives, what they take from them and what they refuse. These are all important and interrelated questions that need to be asked about the austerity narrative, and in what follows I will inevitably be touching on all of these. But it seems to me that there is also a further set of questions to be asked, about how narrative itself works, and these questions have been given less attention in the contemporary debates around austerity and its effects. Can insights from the field of narrative analysis add something to our understanding of how austerity has shifted the terms within which policy debates about inequality and difference are played out?

Narrative analysis is a heterogeneous field of inquiry reflecting the different disciplinary traditions from which work on narrative has emerged (Andrews et al. 2008). In the social sciences, much of the debate within contemporary narrative research has focused on how best to understand personal narratives. These debates have asked questions such as: What is the status of the experiences and/or subjectivities revealed through individual accounts of events?, What might be the effect or role of the listener/audience in the co-construction of narratives?, and What is the relationship between individual internal states and external social circumstances? (ibid.). Since my focus is not on personal narrative but, rather, on the stories being told in and through a particular set of policies,

I am not looking for answers to these questions. My take on narrative analysis is, necessarily therefore, somewhat partial and perhaps idiosyncratic in relation to the social sciences. Nevertheless, I want to argue that thinking carefully about how narrative works can add something of value to considerations of social policy, and looking at policy documents for the narratives they construct can add to our understanding of their discursive and material effects. If we are particularly concerned with how problematic constructions of gender, race, sexuality and disability seep into policy pronouncements and practices, then attending to the formal qualities of particular narratives can also help identify where this happens, even when these markers of social difference are not the explicit object of policy itself. Doing some ‘close reading’ of policy documents, looking particularly at how they craft specific stories by drawing on language and form as the building blocks of narrative can perhaps open up new lines of inquiry (Riessman 2008b: 152).

While techniques of narrative analysis have rarely been systematically applied to policy documents (although see Fairclough 2010; Wiggan 2012), we can begin to see their pertinence if we think about what narrative does. Crafting a coherent narrative requires at its most basic not only the ability to link events into a logical succession, but also to identify motives, purposes and feelings, to speak from a particular moral stance, adopting an evaluative orientation that is socially and culturally comprehensible to others (Salmon and Riessman 2008: 78). As Salmon argues, ‘stories serve a vital function in excusing, justifying, blaming or securing hoped-for things’ and, in order to do so, they need to mobilize economy, coherence and plausibility (ibid.: 79). Crafting an effective narrative can produce or reinforce a stable sense of individual subjectivity, imposing pattern and meaning, purpose and judgement on events and experiences; at the same time, however, it inserts that individual subjectivity into a wider social and cultural setting in order to be comprehensible and convincing. Narrative thus produces the authority of its narrator while at the same time opening out to, and reflecting back, some meaningful aspect of the social world in which that narrator is situated. It can be seen, therefore, as an intensely power-laden practice, a way of ‘imposing a meaningful pattern on what would otherwise be random and disconnected’ (Riessman 2008a: 5) and, as such, of setting the terms within which both



the knowing subject and the object of knowledge are to be defined and framed. As Riessman notes, ‘as persons construct stories of experience, so too do identity groups, communities, nations, governments, and organizations construct preferred narratives about themselves’ (ibid.: 7). While such a statement seems so self-evidently obvious as to be banal, it does invite us to think about how this works in relation to the policies governments argue for, justify and explain in order to secure their ‘hoped-for things’. If, as Riessman says, narratives are ‘strategic, functional and purposeful’ (ibid.: 8), then policies that can be shaped by and as narratives can draw on those qualities to enhance their political effectiveness.

What might this mean when looking at policy documents specifically? First, by imposing a particular chronology, narratives constitute the past and give it specific meanings in relation to present and future. In policy debates, the effective narrative will cast previous governments and policies which it aims to replace as something that needs to be moved beyond in order to move forward; narrative drive and flow can establish what seems to be an inevitable progression through the relations it constitutes between its version of the past and its promise for the future. Once a particular chronology is established by a narrative, it imposes a powerful logic of inevitability for its audience—if we start from this place, we move inexorably through the stages set by this specific narrative towards its end. Disrupting the timeline set by a narrative is quite difficult once we have entered its framing.

Second, the classic narrative device of plotting the build-up to a crisis which is then resolved is crucial to justifying policy changes, especially in a political context in which ‘crisis’ becomes a major framing logic. Which events are given meaning, and what meanings they are given, will determine what is defined as crisis, and what would appear to be its inevitable resolution. In the ‘age of austerity’, we see the crisis-resolution narrative arc deployed repeatedly across the legislative agenda, and paying particular attention to how these crises are defined and resolved is a key focus of this project.

Third, narrative is always an account from a particular point of view; it constructs a positioning that reveals some things and conceals others, and invites us to view an experience from one particular and partial perspective (Riessman 2008a: 8–9). Narrative thus invites identification with its

perspective, and mobilizes rhetoric and affect to construct positions of identification and disavowal for its audience; it is by its nature partisan, and therefore potentially highly political. Riessman suggests a set of basic questions that can be asked of personal narratives:

For whom was *this* story constructed and for what purpose? Why is the succession of events configured that way? What cultural resources does the story draw on or take for granted? What storehouse of plots does it call up? What does the story accomplish? Are there gaps or inconsistencies that might suggest preferred, alternative or counter-narratives?. (Ibid.: 11)

I am arguing that these are questions that can and should be asked of policy narratives as well.

Another way of thinking about this, which highlights the political stakes of story-telling, is to draw on Hemmings' notion of 'political grammar' (Hemmings 2011). Hemmings, looking at the stories feminists tell about their recent past, refers to 'the textual mechanisms that generate coherent meaning and allow for author, context and reader agreement.' These include 'subject/object relationships, binary pairs and the excluded outside, embedded temporality and hierarchy of meaning, citation practices and textual affect' as well as 'how narratives come to function intertextually and how certain strands of thought come to be understood as past or present' (Hemmings 2011: 17). She defines narrative as 'the textual refrains (content and pattern) used to tell stories and their movement across time and space'; grammar as 'the techniques (oppositions, intertextual reference, and so on) that serve as narrative building blocks' and political grammar as 'the stitching together of all these levels as well as the broader political life of these stories' (ibid.: 227, fn 2). The congealing or solidifying of a particular political grammar, one that is collectively repeated or rehearsed to such an extent that it 'actively works to obscure the politics of its own production and reproduction' (ibid.: 22) means that simply counterposing it with an alternative narrative will not dislodge what Hemmings calls 'the relentless persuasiveness of the presumed' (ibid.: 20). Rather, she argues, there is a need to 'identify the techniques through which dominant stories are secured, through which their status as "common sense" is reproduced' (ibid.). In the context of dissatisfaction

and exasperation with austerity narratives, it is not enough to point to the ‘myths’ and ‘lies’ on which they are founded, to simply ‘set the story straight’, or even to point to the superiority of alternative accounts, essential as these critical moves are. I’m arguing that we must also pay attention to the pervasively rehearsed political grammar that austerity narratives deploy.

One aspect of that grammar that Hemmings is particularly interested in tracking is affect, and the ways in which it is mobilized to produce ‘internal textual and external community cohesion that is difficult to resist’ (ibid.: 21, see also Berlant 2011; Fortier 2010). We rarely look at the deployment of affect in policy documentation; indeed, this is a genre of writing that would claim to be relatively affect-free. While the deployment of negative affect in media representations of benefit cheats and swarming migrants has, of course, been critiqued, as has the use of similarly incendiary language in politicians’ public speeches, less attention has been given to how affect is embedded in policy documents. Creating that ‘community cohesion that is difficult to resist’ occurs in the pages of white papers and consultation documents, whether it is through inviting agreement to identify positively with the ‘we’ who are ‘all in this together’, with the ‘hard-working families who do the right thing’, or to incite disavowal of those whose failure to do the right thing has created the crisis a policy claims to address. As Hemmings notes, lack of identification risks positioning the reader themselves as somehow failing, and affect thus becomes a necessary part of the texture of narrative and political investment in the story being told (ibid.: 24). While, as I will discuss in the next section, there is debate over what kind of consensus was being sought for austerity through Coalition policies, or whether popular consent is a major concern in contemporary austerity projects at all, when we look closely at the policy documentation, we can see an affective economy at work (Ahmed 2004) that aims to elicit particular emotional responses in order to consolidate the social relations it privileges.

In summary, then, in reading policy documents as narratives, I am asking the following questions: How is a particular temporality or chronology imposed in these documents? What is cast in and as past, present and future? How are relations of cause and effect, subject and object being discursively constructed in these texts? What are defined as moments of

crisis and of resolution in the ways policy issues are placed and framed? How are point of view and perspective being established—who is the presumed narrator and how are we being invited to view his/her world? What intertextualities or reference points are brought together to generate specific meanings or impose particular perspectives? How and with what/whom are we being invited or incited to identify and disavow? Where are we being called on to judge, tolerate, or champion certain qualities and behaviours? How are such affects as shame, pride, disgust, attachment and entitlement being differentially mobilized?

A final concept I take from Hemmings is the idea of narrative or discursive ‘amenability’ (2011: 7); that is, the amenability of certain narrative constructs and grammatical forms to be co-opted, or put to less desirable or acceptable discursive uses, than those who initially adopt them might wish. In the context of austerity policies, the narrative rests on a particular delineation of the New Labour past as that which must be disavowed because it is the source of that crisis. The relentless repetition of this framing of the past can hide the ways in which many of these policies draw from and build on amenabilities in New Labour’s own narrative justifications of its projects. Thus, I will argue, one of the key unacknowledged intertextualities in many of the documents I will be examining is the groundwork laid by the previous New Labour government for the further discursive retrenchments that were to come under the Coalition. So, in the chapters that follow, I will be regularly looking back to Labour’s dangerous amenabilities in the areas of equality policy, welfare reform, integration and community cohesion, migration and family policies that are picked up and carried forward in the Coalition’s austerity project.

## **Austerity, Crisis, Consensus**

Narrative drive towards ‘author, context and reader agreement’ or ‘community cohesion’ suggests the role of narrative in producing social consensus, and one key issue this book explores is the ways in which policy documents construct their narratives in order to elicit consent, and what kind of consensus is aimed for.

Tyler, writing while the Coalition policy agenda was still emerging, argues that neoliberal democracies function ‘through the generation of consent via fear and anxiety’ (2013: 8) and through the production of what she terms ‘national abjects’ such as the benefit scrounger and the migrant ‘who are imagined to be a parasitical drain and threat to scarce national resource’ (ibid.: 9). The repeated citation of such abjected figures helps to produce a ‘disgust consensus’ as a form of governance that elicits community-wide complicity (ibid.: 23–24). As the following chapters detail, policy narratives are, indeed, full of figures to be disavowed, and play an important role in defining the crises that policies aim to be addressing.

Bhattacharyya, while not disagreeing with Tyler about the ways in which austerity discourse ‘mobilises vilifications of abjected surplus populations’ (2015: 94), argues that this is not the main purpose or effect of the representational politics of austerity. Rather, for her, ‘what is distinctive about the political strategy of austerity is that it is structured to tell us, again and again, that it does not matter what we think’ and ‘to believe that our consent is unnecessary’ (ibid.: 11). Bhattacharyya contrasts this ‘post-consensus’ sensibility with the kind of aspirational narrative deployed under Thatcherism, which offered a certain pleasure through (mis)identification with the neo-liberal, self-reliant subject (ibid.: 38–39). The narratives of austerity offer no such ‘figures of affirming identification’ (ibid.), she argues:

There are two elements to the move away from eliciting consent. One is the presentation of a series of painful interventions, including those that directly or indirectly impose hardship on some sections of society, as if our consent was irrelevant. [...] This is unusual in the history of electoral politics because it represents an open admission of impotence by the ruling party or alliance [...] To know, show and anticipate our vulnerability to global forces and/or international institutions becomes the centre of governmental practice. The second element of moving away from consent is the concerted campaign to persuade the electorate that their views no longer matter [...] austerity heralded a moment when governments and would-be governments proclaimed their plan to institute measures that were unwanted by the electorate and yet were for our own good [...] our views are not and cannot be a part of political planning in our time. (Ibid.: 32)

Bhattacharyya makes a powerful argument that, in the present austerity project being implemented across Europe, there is a relentless repetition of the primacy of economic imperatives. Only arguments framed in economic terms count, and this assertion is accompanied by a relentless degrading of politics. This ‘open admission of impotence’ in the face of global economic forces then becomes a ground for saying, whether you like it or not, there is nothing else that we can do. However, while we can hear echoes of this stance in many of the general government arguments for austerity, and certainly, we will see arguments that too much state intervention is part of the problem, I question whether this fully captures how austerity narratives operate, at least in relation to social policy under the Coalition. When we read them closely, the policy narratives examined in the following chapters do make appeals to consent, and do evoke a desired point of view that represents the good citizen as an aspirational neo-liberal subject who embodies a project of independent self-actualization without relying on the state. I would argue that, when we look at specific policies around equality, social security reform, disability, localism, family and migration, this appeal to identification still operates, and needs to be taken account of, as it forms an important part of these documents’ narrative power.

As Clarke and Newman have argued, one particular terrain on which consent is being sought and contested is ‘the various imaginings of morality that occupy the spaces between economy and society in the present’ (2012: 309). They argue that the economic logic Bhattacharyya has foregrounded is combined with a particular moral appeal, not only to a sense of shared sacrifice and suffering, or collective obligation (as in Cameron’s ‘we are all in this together’, ‘in the national interest’, etc.), but also to notions of ‘fairness’ (ibid.: 316). As I will argue in the coming chapters, this appropriation of the ground of fairness, together with ideas about ‘social justice’, and a narrative about tackling the ‘real root causes’ of inequality and poverty, is fundamental to the story being told in this time of austerity. Clarke and Newman argue that these appeals to morality elicit at best a kind of ‘grudging acquiescence’ (ibid.: 307) or ‘disaffected consent’ (ibid.: 309), given the pain of austerity in a society still ‘dominated by the promises of growth and ever-expanding consumption’ (ibid.: 307). But I think we need to pay more attention to the place of these

ostensibly positive claims to fairness and social justice. Together with the stigmatization of failed neo-liberal subjects or Tyler's 'national abjects' and the authoritarian attitudes towards them that Clarke and Newman note (2012: 311–312), together with the intensified sense of precarity addressed to all of us in order to instate diminished expectations from the state that Bhattacharyya explains so well, austerity discourse's 'intense political-cultural labour to capture the future' (Clarke and Newman 2012: 303) also involves a crucial reworking and appeal to a 'turned around' idea of equality and fairness. This is part of the insidiousness of the social policy narrative in a time of austerity that hasn't received sufficient critical attention. It is its simultaneous appeal to a sense of fairness and social justice, together with its invitation to disavow the stigmatized, which enables it to undercut more critical accounts of the austerity project by stealing some of the language of those critical accounts and putting it to perverse effect.

Much of the groundwork for this appeal to a shared idea of fairness was set out under the previous New Labour government, and this, I will argue, is one of the crucial amenabilities in New Labour policy that has been built upon under the Coalition. From its 2004 *Fairness for All* White Paper, setting out the establishment of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, through the 2007 *Equalities Review* carried out under the chairmanship of Trevor Phillips and the 2008 *Framework for a Fairer Future* which set the direction for the 2010 Equality Act, New Labour's 'equality talk' (Gedalof 2013) was very much about foregrounding a new, 'more positive' view of equality that breaks with an old approach associated with 'bureaucratic finger-wagging and legal restriction' (*Equalities Review* 2007: 2). As I've argued elsewhere (Gedalof 2013), these documents wove a narrative in which 'stopping the abuse of power by both individuals and institutions to discriminate' (*Equalities Review* 2007: 1) is described as something that was historically necessary but which is now associated with the past. In mobilizing a language of fairness for all, New Labour also cast its approach to equality against the special pleading of identity politics, which especially positioned an attention to race and racism as somehow both old-fashioned and divisive. For example, the *Equalities Review*, without claiming that work to 'lessen the baleful influence of prejudice and to remove the grinding

reality of everyday discrimination and harassment' (ibid.: 1) was fully completed, still suggested that it was time to reframe equality in more positive terms that would persuade the British people 'that equality is a liberating rather than an oppressive ambition' (ibid.: 2). The 'everybody wins' version of equality, indebted to the business case for diversity that consolidated itself under New Labour, together with the repetitive foregrounding of the vague and universalizing language of 'fairness' over the language of inequality or discrimination, works to strip equality talk of its critical edge. By untying difference from unequal power relations, and resituating it at the level of notional individuals 'free to choose and direct their own destinies' (Mason 2002: 90) this perspective ignores collective sources of disadvantage (ibid.: 93) and the privilege that some in society are able to exercise because of the ways in which differences are socially and culturally constituted. 'Fairness' lives very comfortably within a liberal model of equality for which the individual is the focus, and for which social difference is always a problem that needs to be overcome. 'Fairness' can claim to apply equally to everyone, to be a universal standard that bears the same meaning for all. The argument that fairness might need to start from the acknowledgement of difference (Scott 1988) is erased from view in this liberal model. There are always limits on the degree of difference that can be accommodated by liberal accounts of equality (Brown 2006: 36) and New Labour did crucial discursive work to set the terms for further retrenchment of an attention to difference under the Coalition.

This problematizing of differences works at a number of levels in the narratives I will be looking at in the following chapters. At times, there is an explicit targeting of minoritized populations as failed neo-liberal subjects. We see this most clearly in the construction of the disabled person as benefit scrounger (Chap. 4), in the characterization of 'unintegrated' minority communities in the account of localism and the Big Society (Chap. 7), in the positioning of the migrant family as threat to the national interest (Chap. 6), and in the threat to normative gender posed by 'troubled families' (Chap. 5). The degraded vision of equality policy explored in Chap. 2, which makes attention to collective difference and disadvantage almost unsayable, follows through to infect the evocations of fairness and social justice elaborated across all the policy areas.



But, at the same time, this impoverished account of equality and justice persists in making claims to own these terms. Disability policy appropriates elements of the critical social model—its accounts of independent living and autonomous choice—and turns them into arguments for neo-liberal retraction of state support. ‘Social justice’ is redefined into a project that identifies the ‘root causes’ of poverty in the undermining of traditional gendered norms of marriage and the family. The ‘liberating’ capacity of paid work is eulogized while silencing the withdrawal of public support for the reproductive work of care upon which it relies, with deeply gendered consequences. Promises of giving power back to the people underpin the localism agenda and the Big Society project, while remaining mute about the racialized, classed and gendered dynamics of local spaces, and about the massive withdrawal of funding to local government that forms part of these projects. Incorporating and appropriating the language of social critique while deforming its critical edge makes these narratives harder to resist, adding further layers of complexity that need to be unpicked.

More implicitly, but no less dangerously, what Bhattacharyya calls the ‘scarcity logic of austerity’ (2015: 111) mobilizes the techniques of racism and racialization to sort, dispossess and disentitle categories of people in order ‘to construct a system of far more starkly variegated access to social goods’ (ibid.: 116). Even where there is little or no discernible targeting of racialized groups, ‘austerity in this mode marks the space of public life as a racialized terrain where bodies are ordered and attributed value according to arbitrary but highly consequential categorisation’ (ibid.: 112). Across the following chapters, we can see this move to re-naturalize inequalities repeated regularly, in order to justify differentiated entitlement and attribute varying value to different populations, most obviously in relation to welfare reform (Chaps. 3 and 4), but also in migration and integration policies (Chaps. 6 and 7). For Bhattacharyya, these governmental practices of sorting populations in relation to variegated entitlements have also drawn in civil society (2015: 116) so that these ways of managing difference are increasingly taken up by non-state actors. We certainly see this reflected across specific policies—new ways of moving the borders inside to intensify surveillance of migrant families, drawing

on the language of localism to enforce a particular vision of integration, intensive scrutiny and intervention in relation to families defined as ‘troubled’—all these policies reach out to incorporate community and voluntary sectors into their projects of surveillance, disentanglement and governmentality. What I would add to Bhattacharyya’s argument here is that the appropriation of a language of fairness, justice and local empowerment is an intrinsic part of this expansive governmentality, helping to justify the invitation to the ‘good citizen’ to take part in disciplining themselves and others.

What carries gender through all these social policy areas is the problem of social reproduction. If we understand the welfare state as the public instrument of social reproductive practices, then austerity policies aimed at retrenching the welfare state must make an argument that these practices will and should be picked up by non-state actors. We know that these actors are more often than not women and, in relation to the demands of social care and support in old age, are increasingly migrant and minority ethnic women, and so the desired desocializing or privatizing of social reproduction will have deeply gendered and racialized effects (see Bhattacharyya 2015: 177; see also Williams 2011; Hochschild 2000; Lonergan 2015). This is the case for those women who keep the welfare state working, through their employment in health and social care sectors, in early years care and education, whether in public sector or privatized settings (Pearson and Elson 2015). It is also the case for those women who will be expected to pick up the slack of reproductive support when the state retreats from providing certain services.

At the same time, and this has perhaps received less critical attention, there is a preoccupation with scrutinizing and disciplining the manner in which social reproduction takes place across the social policy agenda. Bhattacharyya argues that ‘the erasure of reproductive labour from public view has relegated the whole business of sustaining human life to the realm of half-light’ (2015: 178), but it sits only barely beneath the surface in the ways stories are being told about social security reform, ‘troubled families’, integration and family migration. Those who carry out their reproductive activities in ways that would seem to place too great a burden on the state, or who make what are deemed to be inappropriate

claims of entitlement to belonging and mutual support, become the object of intensified intervention and control. As Pearson and Elson (2015) have argued, there is no place in mainstream economic accounts to value the reproductive sphere and understand its gendered interaction with finance and production, and mainstream understandings of the economic crisis and its solutions continue to erase the reproductive. Similarly, I would argue, the reproductive sits outside mainstream views of the political or, rather, sits as a troublesome incursion into the political that must be taken in hand, disciplined in such a way as to not make too many demands on the political, and managed in line with normative understandings of gender.

For a project which aims at the relentless erosion of people's sense of entitlement in their relationship to the state (Bhattacharyya 2015: 98), disciplining the reproductive is crucial. This is not only because much of what people might think they should be entitled to is state support for the work of social reproduction. It is also related to the nature of reproductive work itself. As Bhattacharyya puts it, 'the very concept of entitlement only arises with the possibility of imagining mutuality between human beings' (ibid.: 99), so that the weakening of entitlement is also a process of dismantling collective bonds. Austerity then becomes:

a multi-pronged process of disentanglement [...] a concerted campaign to remake subjectivity so that those who may have previously imagined themselves as citizens or residents or neighbours or recipients learn to renarrate the terrain of political life to encompass new differentiated statuses linked to differentiated entitlement [...] systems of support become little more than occasions to assess how undeserving individuals and families are. (Ibid.: 147)

Managing the reproductive is key to this process of undermining collective bonds and mutuality, because it is in reproductive work, especially in different forms of care, that relations of mutuality, interdependence and the recognition of human vulnerabilities are played out. This is precisely what the neo-liberal model of the citizen erases, and so the gendered work of reproduction will always pose a problem—both material and symbolic—for a neo-liberal project of austerity.

## Structure of the Book

In each of the following chapters, I focus on one area of social policy under the Coalition government. In each case, I examine a set of texts explaining and justifying the given policy for their narrative qualities. My main texts in each chapter are extended policy documents—Consultation Documents and Government Responses to Consultations, White Papers and other major policy papers—that develop their arguments at sufficient length and in sufficient detail to be able to discern how the elements of narrative discussed above are deployed. I also draw, at times, on extended speeches introducing policies or working out the rationale for particular policy directions and, in one case, transcripts of parliamentary debate. While media accounts of policy are included throughout the book, including media pronouncements by government ministers and civil servants, these are not my principal focus. I concentrate on the official policy documentation as the most complete source of the preferred narratives being constructed during the time of the Coalition.

In subjecting these documents to a close reading, I provide many extended quotations throughout the book, which I hope readers will not find too tedious. My wish is to give sufficient detail of the original documents so that readers can follow how I have carried out my narrative analysis and where the narrative techniques I have identified are being deployed.

Chapter 2 focuses on equality policy and the ‘new vision’ of equality announced soon after the 2010 election. It reads the new government’s Equality Strategy document, its reviews of the Public Sector Equality Duty and of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), and its rationale for including the 2010 Equality Act in its ‘Red Tape Challenge’, in order to see how equality policy was being made to fit into the political logic of austerity and a minimized state. It focuses particularly on how the narrative techniques of imposing chronology and point of view, and delineating the crisis and its resolution, are deployed to frame this new vision of equality. The impoverished neo-liberal vision of equality produced in these documents operates both to individualize and to neutralize the definition of equality, so that it becomes one corporate

objective among others, and so that the space for considering collective disadvantage and structural inequalities based on social differences is severely constrained. By reducing equality to a limited sense of individual equality of opportunity, and by neutralizing the role of the state in addressing structural or institutional discrimination, this ‘turning around’ of equalities policy sets the stage for further retrenchments in the treatment of social difference across the Coalition social policy agenda.

Chapter 3 is the first of two looking at the Coalition project of ‘welfare reform’. It focuses on the narrative of a crisis of ‘welfare dependency’ developed through a series of reports by the Centre for Social Justice in the years prior to the 2010 election, and its application in the Coalition’s Green Paper *21st Century Welfare* and White Paper *Universal Credit: Welfare that Works*, both produced in 2010. I begin by tracing the contours of the narrative arc of crisis and resolution embedded in these documents, then move on to look at the dynamics of address that are mobilized, before paying particular attention to the ways in which gender and the reproductive are put into play within this narrative. I look at how consent for this centrepiece of Coalition policy is elicited through the repeated appeal to/construction of an ideal reader who ‘does the right thing’ by forsaking any sense of entitlement to social support and who, instead, embraces neo-liberal austerity’s appeal to autonomy from the state. This narrative politics of address works to produce a vision of the citizen-subject and of that subject’s entitlements, which is multiply marked by gender. The narrative relies most obviously on a targeting of the non-normative family as burden on the state, and on a championing of traditional marriage as bedrock of society. But there is also a less obvious gendering of the narrative in the ways in which the crisis of welfare dependency is cast as resulting from the excess that the reproductive itself represents, and from the mobilizing of those highly gendered qualities of independence vs. interdependence, productive labour vs. reproductive care.

These dynamics are further explored in Chap. 4, where I consider the narrative production of the disabled person as ‘benefit scrounger’. The crafting of this narrative strand is examined via a close reading of both the ‘welfare reform’ documents considered in Chap. 3 for the ways in which they deal with disability benefits, and of a series of disability policy documents produced under the ‘Fulfilling Potential’ programme. I explore how

the narrative appropriates elements of the social model of disability and the disability rights movement's mobilizing of a language of independent living and autonomy, while using them for very different purposes. I also explore how it consolidates and intensifies the production of the disabled person as subject of governmentality, as a subject that needs to be taken in hand, managed and produced through the surveillance and disciplining of the state. In these documents, the possibilities of subject status for disabled people are reduced almost exclusively to their relationship to paid work. At the same time, in its articulation of both crisis and resolution, the narrative retracts and almost eliminates any space in which to consider the complexities of a debilitated body, consolidating the neo-liberal move to 'compulsory able-bodiedness'. While none of the story of disability being told in these policy documents is explicitly gendered, I argue that a large part of what its political grammar forecloses is the social activity of reproductive care, which is always implicitly gendered. Once again, the reproductive sits as an uncomfortable excess to the vision of constrained entitlement being offered to the disabled person under austerity; it is what needs to be left out for the narrative to proceed in its own terms.

Chapter 5 examines two policy strands that accompanied the move to radical retrenchment of the social security system, the Social Justice Strategy and the Troubled Families Programme. I focus primarily on the Department for Work and Pensions' March 2012 policy document 'Social Justice: Transforming Lives', and two reports issued in the same year by the Department for Communities and Local Government, 'Listening to Troubled Families' (July 2012) and 'Working with Troubled Families' (December 2012) to trace the contours of this story about the need to 'turn around' the social justice agenda through turning around the lives of troubled families. In the process, I track how the language of social justice is turned on its head to become a story of bad individual choices and the crisis of troubled families becomes, among other things, a crisis of normative gender. I argue that, in redefining Social Justice to target what it positions as the dysfunctional family and its individual bad behaviour, and in evoking the Troubled Family as the legitimate object of intensive surveillance and discipline, this narrative reinstates some very old assumptions about the gendered private sphere of family and reproduction, with deeply troubling effects. Reading these policies in

conjunction with the narrative on welfare reform reveals how normative gender—and, in particular, the scrutinizing of poor women’s reproductive practices—is even more firmly stitched into the narrative of welfare dependency and how poor women’s inappropriate reproductive activities becomes a rationale for positioning them as remedial or deficient citizens.

Chapter 6 turns to another kind of family making trouble for the normative reproductive sphere in times of austerity, the migrant family. I trace a narrative arc constructed over the five years of Coalition government that tells a story about migration and reproduction, and that poses the right to a family life for migrants as a particular problem to the successful reproduction of national belonging. My primary focus is on the July 2011 Consultation document *Securing our Border, Controlling Migration, Family Migration*, which provides the fullest narrative account of the thinking behind the policy, and identify three interconnected strands. First, that the state needs to crack down on ‘sham’ marriages and families, and needs to strengthen its power to define what constitutes the real marriage/family, extending its bordering practices into ever-increasing sectors of civil society and widening the imperative for both migrants and citizens to prove themselves worthy of belonging. Second, that foreign partners need to be able to demonstrate a genuine attachment to the UK and to integrate into its norms, *before* being allowed to enter or remain in the country—they need to be willing to marry the nation and not just an individual citizen. Third, tying family migration policy into the austerity agenda examined throughout this book, the proper family is one that is not a burden on the taxpayer, who is presumed to be not a migrant and to be a good neo-liberal citizen who should be able to manage their own life. Together, these three strands work to strengthen the sense that the migrant family represents a reproductive burden that is too great for the country to bear.

This entanglement of bordering and reproductive practices in order to delineate the spaces of national belonging is a preoccupation that also inflects the story being told about integration policy under the Coalition government, which I turn to in Chap. 7. In this final chapter, I look at integration policy narratives under the Coalition and relate them to government policies on localism and the Big Society. While rarely looked at

together, these three policies are explicitly linked in government discourse and in the wider narratives that surround them. Their interrelationship relies on a particular casting of the local, as both the preferred site of policy interventions in relation to integration and, discursively, as the space, or rather *place*, where the relationship between individuals as citizens, as members of particular communities (including racialized groups) and an austere state ought to meet. I am particularly interested in the underlying assumptions about the nature of ‘place’ that underpin all three policy areas, and that instate place as ‘naturally’ tied to familiarity, sameness and stasis. Thinking about local places of belonging in this manner becomes a way to tell a singular story about the local that produces difference as inevitably problematic and that sites that difference in the racialized bodies of minoritized populations, especially migrants and Muslims. Muted, but nevertheless persistent intersections of race with gender permeate this narrative, in the ways in which place is attached to the feminized sphere of reproduction and in the ways in which minoritized groups are sometimes seen as problematically reproducing relations of gendered inequalities and intolerance that the majority British ‘we’ has ostensibly left behind. Gendered equality is used instrumentally here as one of a number of resources to close down attention to the structural relations of power that underpin the ‘problem’ of integration, and gender equality itself is culturalized and turned into a fixed quality that marks the boundary between a settled British majority and a racialized minority resistant to integration on majority terms. Much of this narrative works through a mobilizing of notions of ‘the common’—the common good of ‘the people’, a common culture of ‘the nation’ and a naturalized common sense. Rhetorical moves to foreground these various versions of the common become a way to instate sameness as the necessary precondition for belonging. Difference is something that is imported from an elsewhere, and which threatens an already settled British way of life, values and principles. The role of the austere state here is to limit the amount of difference that can be allowed to penetrate the spaces of the local, and to ration its entitlements to those who will not seriously unsettle these imagined places of sameness.

A final, brief Post-Script offers some reflections on how the narrative strands and techniques articulated in this book are being reworked and



consolidated in post-Coalition Britain. In a somewhat troubling narrative circularity, I end with the woman I started with, now Prime Minister Theresa May, and consider how, in the name of change, she reinstates many of the fundamental terms of engagement of the austerity narratives this book seeks to understand and challenge.

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# 2

## Turning Around Equalities

This chapter explores the narrative strategies and ‘political grammar’ deployed by the UK Coalition government (2010–2015) in carrying out its promise to, in the words of then Home Secretary Theresa May, ‘radically turn around the equalities agenda’. By deploying narrative analysis to read a series of equality policy documents, it reveals how this policy was being made to fit into the political logic of austerity and a minimized state. I focus on the ways in which these documents deploy such narrative devices as chronology (what is cast as past and future), narrative arc (cause and effect, crisis and resolution), perspective (how and with what/whom we are being invited to identify and disavow), affect (what qualities we are being invited to judge, tolerate, abject or champion) and intertextuality (how equalities policy cites and references other government initiatives). Attending to these narrative qualities enables an understanding of how consent was being elicited for a vision of equality that is tethered to an austerity agenda.

The Coalition government first introduced its overall approach in its 2010 Equality Strategy paper (Government Equalities Office 2010). In 2012, it announced a review of the work and remit of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), the independent statutory body

set up by New Labour to monitor human rights, promote equality and combat discrimination across the nine ‘protected characteristics’ covered by the 2010 Equality Act, including gender, race, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, and marriage and civil partnership. In 2013, it announced a further review, this time of one aspect of the 2010 Equality Act known as the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). During these years, it was also decided to include the 2010 Equality Act among the pieces of legislation and regulation to be included in the government’s ‘Red Tape Challenge’, an online initiative that invited the public to comment on how best to enact a project of ‘freeing up business and society from the burden of excessive regulation’ ([www.redtapechallenge.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/home/index/](http://www.redtapechallenge.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/home/index/). Accessed 10 January 2014).

While these initiatives were presented as a radical break with New Labour’s approach to equality policy, Labour’s own framing of equality and diversity narratives in the lead-up to the 2010 Equality Act produced crucial amenabilities for retrenchment which, we shall see, were then further developed by the Coalition. These included the casting of radical activism and theoretical developments around race and gender in particular as belonging ‘in the past’ and as a kind of special pleading that sets a politics of difference against the interests of ‘the people’. By redefining equality in the deliberately vague language of ‘fairness’, and ‘in everyone’s interests’, this new ‘more positive’ take on equality worked to mask unequal power relations of privilege and subordination, and to provide a rationale for a return to a neo-liberal focus on the individual delinked from the social structuring of difference and inequality (see Gedalof 2013). Building on these dangerous amenabilities introduced by New Labour, equality under the Coalition government was thus being even more firmly entrenched within the neo-liberal terms of the self-actualizing individual, casting any attention to collective sources of inequality on the grounds of such differences as gender, race or disability as outdated, bureaucratic obstacles to such self-actualization, and further contracting the space within which non-normative claims for recognition and redress of socially disadvantaged groups could be heard.

In this chapter, I look primarily at three sets of documents produced in the initial three years of the Coalition government (May 2010–September

2013). First, I look at the introduction of the government's equality strategy as laid out in Theresa May's 2010 speech, in the subsequent document 'The Equality Strategy: Building a Fairer Britain' (December 2010) and in the 2012 'Equality Strategy Progress Report'. In these initial documents, the broad strokes of the government's narrative framing of equality emerge. Second, I focus on the government's account of the need to reform the EHRC, looking particularly at the 'Government Response to the Consultation on Reform of the EHRC' (Government Equalities Office 2012b). Here, I pay particular attention to the ways in which what is meant by equality is being defined, and how this definition further retracts the space in which to consider collective or structural sources of disadvantage. While this redefinition undercuts the explanatory power of all the so-called 'equality strands' or 'protected characteristics' covered by the 2010 Equality Act, it has particularly problematic effects in the erasure of race which results. Finally, I look at the 2013 Report of the Public Sector Equality Duty Review (Government Equalities Office 2013) and the ways in which the language of red tape and bureaucracy was deployed to further shift the terms within which equality is understood.

These were not the only government initiatives regarding equality policy over the three years in question. Once the 2010 Equality Act devised under Labour came into effect under the new government, there followed a series of decisions not to implement aspects of the Act (most notably the 'socio-economic duty' that called on public sector bodies to have due regard to addressing socio-economic inequalities, as well as those relating to the 'protected characteristics' of gender, race, and so on covered by the Public Sector Equality Duty) and to consult further on repealing others (e.g., provisions regarding the power of employment tribunals to make wider recommendations in discrimination cases). Significantly for my purposes here, the decision to include a 'spotlight on equalities' as part of the government's Red Tape Challenge in June 2011 raised widespread concern about the government's intentions regarding the Equality Act. The decision to undertake a formal review of the Public Sector Equality Duty, for example, is presented in Maria Miller's September 2013 ministerial statement as deriving directly from the Red Tape Challenge, and, as we shall see, involves narratively framing both the Equality Duty itself and its subsequent

review as having, primarily, to do with eliminating bureaucracy. Nevertheless, I focus on these three policy moments because, together, I see them as key to tracing the contours of how equality was to be narrated under the Coalition—together, forming what I want to call a tragedy in three acts.

## Act One: The Equality Strategy

The Coalition government's new vision of equality was first introduced by then Home Secretary and Equalities Minister Theresa May in a speech she gave in London in November 2010. As a speech—an explicit form of political rhetoric that draws on particular narrative devices—it also gives us a useful starting point for looking at how the story of equality is being crafted. Much of May's language in this speech is repeated in the more formal record of the policy paper 'The Equality Strategy: Building a Fairer Britain' which it announced, and in the Progress Report published two years later, and I draw on all three documents in the following discussion.

As with all narratives, May's speech works to establish a chronology of events, differentiating past, present and future. The past, in this context, is the problematic legacy of the Labour government which in the present needs to be 'turned around' in order to build a more promising future:

But in recent years, equality has become a dirty word because it meant something different. *It came to be associated with the worst forms of pointless political correctness and social engineering.* I want to turn around the equalities agenda and I want to change people's perception of what the government is trying to achieve on equality. [...] And I want us to move away from the arrogant notion from government that it knows best. Government can act as a leader, a convenor and an advocate for change. But on its own it will only ever make limited progress. We need to work with people, communities and businesses to empower them to enact change. Only if we do that; only if we work with the grain of human nature, not against it, will we achieve the fairer, more equal and more prosperous society that we all want to see. (May 2010, emphasis added)

A similar framing is seen two years later in the Progress Report:

This new approach does not see equality as an add-on or a bureaucratic process. *The previous Government's focus on regulation and process led to the creation of a self-sustaining 'equality industry' that advocated gold plating procedure often at the expense of impact.* We are focusing our efforts in *developing intelligent policies that can give people real opportunities to improve their lives.* Our focus is on transparency, better information and greater accountability to drive change. (Government Equalities Office 2012a, emphasis added)

These statements work to produce a particular version of the past in order to define the present—that past is marked by social engineering, too-big government, bureaucracy and an emphasis on procedure (gold plated, no less) over impact; the present by a focus on the individual, on ‘human nature’, on small government in order to free the individual to improve their own life. In fact, much of this is actually framed in very similar terms to Labour’s account of a ‘new, more positive definition of equality as fairness’ (see Gedalof 2013); indeed, I would argue that this is a key amenability in Labour’s equality talk that was being taken up and extended. And yet, the story being told here must recast the past as something completely different, in order for this narrative of progress to work.

What is added, and what distinguishes this narrative from Labour’s, is the explicit production of the state as the principle obstacle to enacting genuine equality, rather than a ‘self-sustaining “equality industry”’. While, for Labour, the narrative arc of crisis and resolution involved the state moving on from the special pleading of narrow identity politics to speak for ‘the people’, here it is the too-big and interventionist state that has created the crisis that needs to be resolved:

The gradual evolution of equality law led to a ‘strand-based’ approach to equality with different laws to protect different groups. Putting people into different categories *simply because they ticked a box on a form* ignores their needs as an individual. At the same time, some people have been made to feel as if equality is not for them.

This strategy sets out the Government’s new approach to tackling inequality: *one that moves away from treating people as groups or ‘equality*



*strands' and instead recognises that we are a nation of 62 million individuals.*  
(Government Equalities Office 2010)

Ultimately, the problem of the past was to think of people as defined by group or collective identities or positioning, not the collective or group or structural disadvantage or discrimination they experienced. The solution is to reinstate their status as individuals, and to do this by drawing back the role of the state. Here, we also need to note the way the critique of a 'tick-box' culture—first developed by theorists and practitioners critical of the business case for diversity and its inattention to the unequal power relations structuring social difference—is reappropriated for quite different political purposes. As Sara Ahmed has argued, May's dismissal of aspects of the Equality Act as 'just another box to be ticked' appropriates the critique of the limits of the equality regime under Labour in order to serve an argument in which 'equality and diversity are being repositioned as what the nation cannot afford to have'. While May might be right to describe the new equality regime as box ticking, Ahmed argues:

if there is a right, there is also a wrong. The wrong can be heard in dismissal of the 'just another.' We learn from how easily a critique of performance culture can be transformed into a caricature that there is still a purpose to ticking boxes. If equality can be a way of 'going through the motions' these motions give the institution a direction; the motions themselves direct attention. (Ahmed 2012: 111)

While Ahmed's focus here is on individual institutions and their implementation of equality policies, her point applies more broadly to the vision of equality embedded in those policies and the ways in which even a limited acknowledgement of collective or structural sources of inequality is worth protecting. 'Turning around' equalities in the way proposed by May precisely involves turning away from any attention to the collective. Imperfect as the language of equality strands might be, it at least keeps open a discursive space in which to consider that people's experiences of inequality might have to do with more than their individual circumstances. It is this space that is closed down when equality talk can only be framed in terms of '62 million individuals'.

This undermining of any attention to collective sources of disadvantage—reduced to ticking a box—also works to address the presumed reader/listener solely as an individual and to appeal to their individual sense of right and wrong, and individual entitlement to opportunity. The narrative operates from the perspective of a hard-working individual, and we are invited to identify in those terms:

And it is not right or fair when the opportunities open to people are not based on their ambition, ability or hard work, but on who their parents are or where they live. *But even as we increase equality of opportunity, some people will always do better than others. And, certainly, I do not believe in a world where everybody gets the same out of life, regardless of what they put in. That is why no government should try to ensure equal outcomes for everyone.* (May 2010, emphasis added)

Here, turning around equalities means that, freed from the crude social engineering of the Labour years, we can now go back to judging people as individuals, solely in terms of their individual efforts to get out what they put in. The perspective being produced here also involves an individualizing of the obstacles to equality—who their parents are, where they live. The subject of equality discourse we are being invited to identify with is the neo-liberal, autonomous, self-actualizing subject who ‘gets out’ what they ‘put in’, foreclosing any attention to the specific collective and structural sources of disadvantage through which those individuals might be positioned or constrained. To identify obstacles to equality with any named collectivities—be they gender, race, disability, and so on—is to be disavowed, since this is discursively tied not only to a sterile exercise of box-ticking, but also to an imposition of equal outcomes, read here as an unfair entitlement to get out something you have not put in.

In framing the presumed audience in this way, we are also being called on to judge, disavow or champion certain qualities and behaviours:

Those growing up in households which have fallen too far behind have fewer opportunities available to them and they are less able to take the opportunities that are available. *We see it with families of three generations who have no qualifications and no job.* But you do not improve the lives of

those at the bottom by limiting the ambitions and opportunities of others. Instead, we need to design intelligent policies that give those at the bottom real opportunities to *make a better life for themselves*. (May 2010, emphasis added)

Here, we begin to see an explicit merging of the narrative on equality with the narrative on welfare reform—this trope or figure of the ‘family of three generations who have no qualification and no job’ evoked by Theresa May just six months after the 2010 election was to become central to Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith’s project of radical welfare reform, in which it is the poor choices and dysfunctional lifestyles of individuals that become the obstacle to greater equality or, in his favoured terminology, ‘social justice’, as we will see in the coming chapters.

This merging of equality and austerity narratives is then further reinforced through the intertextualities knitted into the equality strategy. In the context of reading policy documents, I understand looking for intertextuality to mean looking for how individual policies cite or reference each other, and we have a fine example of this in the 2012 Progress Report on the Equality Strategy.

*We do not see equality in isolation from the Government’s overall ambition to achieve greater freedom, fairness and responsibility. The Equality Strategy is one element in the Government’s armoury to tackle disadvantage. It is complemented by a range of other measures. The Social Mobility Strategy ‘Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers’, published in April 2011, seeks to break cycles of disadvantage linked to family background. In December 2011, a funding of £450 million was made available to address the problems faced by the 120,000 ‘Troubled Families’. The Child Poverty Strategy, published in April 2011, focuses on providing support to the most vulnerable children. In February 2012, we published ‘Creating the conditions for integration’ setting out our approach to achieving a more integrated society. In March 2012, we launched a new Social Justice Strategy, putting forward a new way of both preventing and tackling multiple disadvantages. And we are currently developing a Strategy to address the barriers that disabled people face to equal participation in society. (Government Equalities Office 2012a, emphasis added)*

This apparently positive list of all the weapons in the government's armoury to tackle disadvantage needs closer examination, because at least four of them—the Troubled Families initiative, disability strategy, the integration strategy and the social justice strategy—are central to the austerity framework I will explore in future chapters. The tying of equality to an overall ambition of 'greater freedom, fairness and responsibility' also needs close attention, suggesting as it does that the subject of equality policy requires freedom from an over-intrusive state and personal responsibility for 'putting in' what they will 'get out' in the name of fairness.

Together, these narrative techniques end up situating equality within a framework of austerity and this goes beyond what we might have expected from a conservative government in a time of financial crisis—that is, that equality is something that businesses, the economy and the state simply can't afford. More troublingly because more insidiously, this narrative framing tethers equality to the neo-liberal terms of the self-actualizing individual, so that, as we shall see in the coming chapters, it is about equality for 'strivers' not 'scroungers', equality as 'social justice' redefined in Iain Duncan Smith's terms as being tied to highly normative gendered 'family values', equality as integration of the racialized and ethnic minority other into a normative, pre-defined space of 'the local'. This vision of equality, and the narrative justifying it, sets up the necessary discursive space within which a range of austerity policies can be developed, by undercutting and delimiting the sense of collective entitlement to which disadvantaged citizens might make claims. Whatever limited gains might have been made over the years to incorporate some attention to the collective, structural nature of inequality into governmental policy are necessarily stripped away in this narrative, taking us back to a very limited, liberal model of formal equality of opportunity directed at the unmarked, generic individual. If, as Bhattacharyya has argued, the austerity project aims to 'to remake the terrain of the social in such a manner that previous agreements about equality and the reach of mutuality are under threat' (2015: 1)—so that previous attempts to address systematic inequality become part of the problem that needs to be tackled (*ibid.*: 6) —then 'turning around' the story about equality policy is a crucial first step.

## Act Two: Reforming the Equality and Human Rights Commission

It was within the context of this ‘vision’ of equality that, in 2011–2012, the government undertook a consultation to consider reforms to the EHRC. The key areas under scrutiny were the EHRC’s remit and, in particular, the framing of its duties; its involvement in ‘non-core activities’, including running a helpline; a grants programme and involvement in conciliation in non-workplace disputes; as well as the governance of the Commission. The proposed changes were met with general opposition from campaigning organizations and practitioner forums, and were widely seen as an attempt to narrow the remit of the EHRC and to make a drastic cut in its budget (see, e.g., Equality and Diversity Forum 2011; Runnymede 2011). While the full effects of the legislative changes that followed on from the consultation are still developing, it is clear that both of these feared results have occurred, and both certainly make sense in an overall climate of shrinking the role and the cost of the state. In the following section, however, I focus not so much on the specific legislative and policy changes that have resulted from this consultation and their effects but, rather, on the ways in which the narrative framing of the ‘problem’ that the EHRC constitutes for the government’s new equality strategy is developed, and how the proposed solution of that problem further entrenches a limited vision of what is meant by equality.

In relation to clarifying the remit of the EHRC, the government proposed, first, to repeal the Commission’s ‘general duty’ framed in the 2006 Equality Act as follows:

### General duty

The Commission shall exercise its functions under this Part with a view to encouraging and supporting the development of a society in which—

- (a) people’s ability to achieve their potential is not limited by prejudice or discrimination,
- (b) there is respect for and protection of each individual’s human rights,
- (c) there is respect for the dignity and worth of each individual,
- (d) each individual has an equal opportunity to participate in society, and

- (e) there is mutual respect between groups based on understanding and valuing of diversity and on shared respect for equality and human rights. (2006 Equality Act, Section 3)

The rationale for repealing the duty is not based on any explicit critique of the values it expresses but, rather, because ‘this has no specific legal purpose and does not help to clarify the precise functions that the EHRC is required to carry out’ (Government Equalities Office 2012b). Why should the government want to repeal such a general statement of the overall purpose of the Commission? A general duty functions much like a corporate or organizational mission statement, laying down a discursive marker for how the organization wishes to be seen, rather than compelling the organization to do anything in particular. The values expressed in the General Duty are more or less identical to the vision of equality Theresa May articulated in her 2010 speech, except perhaps for the specific reference to relations between groups in the final point. Why should it matter that one small section of the Act has ‘no specific legal purpose’, or does not speak to the ‘precise functions’ of the EHRC, when these kinds of general statements of overall vision have become so commonplace for both public and private institutions? What is it about the EHRC that disqualifies it from entitlement to such a general vision? The government’s thinking is that:

As a ‘mission statement’, we think its breadth has hindered rather than helped the EHRC’s Board and management to define the organisation’s purpose, and we think that it would be more appropriate for the EHRC to be able to articulate its mission in its three-year strategic plan, taking account of the current context and input from those it works with. (Government Equalities Office 2012b)

The government locates the General Duty as part of the problem of a ‘lack of precision in its legislative mandate’ (ibid.) that has contributed to the Commission’s ‘underperformance to date’ (ibid.). So, it would appear, the first problem with the EHRC is that it has aimed to have too general a vision of its remit, and that the General Duty has contributed to the Commission losing its way.

The second part of the EHRC's remit that was to be repealed was its 'good relations duty' defined in Section 10 of the Act under the heading 'Groups'. Here, the Commission is charged with promoting the understanding of the importance of good relations between members of different groups and between members of groups and others; with encouraging good practice in those relations; with working towards eliminating prejudice, hatred and hostility towards members of groups; and enabling members of groups to participate in society. The groups in question are those 'who share a common attribute' in respect of age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation (Equality Act 2006, Section 10). The types of activities related to this duty were further defined in Section 19 and include monitoring and preventing crimes affecting certain groups, as well as promoting social, recreational, sporting, civic, educational, or other activities designed to involve members of groups (Equality Act 2006, Section 19). Here, the rationale is that:

a separate good relations mandate is not necessary. The EHRC's most valuable work in this area, for example its inquiries into disability harassment or the home care of older people, can be carried out under its existing equality and human rights duties. This will support the EHRC to develop a more integrated and coherent work programme overall. (Government Equalities Office 2012b)

While the General Duty was rejected because it was too general, the specific duty to promote good relations between social groups would appear to be too specific. But we need to note what specificity is written out of the narrative of equality through the scrapping of the Good Relations Duty. By removing the Good Relations Duty, the government was also proposing to remove one of few key references in the Act to social groups and to group-based discrimination, hostility, crime and exclusion. This solidifies the move to frame the equality narrative in an individualizing language and to undercut the possibilities of speaking about any collective sources of disadvantage.

But this erasure also has unequal effects with regard to different forms of collective power inequalities. In this telling of the story of the Good

Relations Duty, we need to note, in particular, what is happening to race. While the groups referred to in the Duty include all the equality strands, there is a specific reference to the pertinence of the duty in relation to ‘groups defined by reference to race, religion or belief’, and this understanding is reflected in many of the objections to the proposed repeal of the Duty that were lodged especially by race equality campaigners (see Runnymede 2011). The fear that changes to the EHRC would contribute to writing race out of the equality narrative are further reconfirmed when we look at how the government response characterizes the EHRC’s past ‘best work in this regard’—references are made above to work on disability and age, later in the document there is reference to the ‘Map of Gaps’ which mapped services for women who have experienced violence (Government Equalities Office 2012b), but there is no reference at all to any of the Commission’s work on or with racialized communities. Runnymede argued that the proposed repeal of the Duty also needed to be seen in the context of the proposed removal of the EHRC’s strategic grants function, which was an important source of funding for a range of Black and Minority Ethnic groups, and in the context of proposals to remove references to diversity from the specific equality duties laid out in Section 8 of the Act (Runnymede 2011). The cumulative effect of these proposed changes would be the serious undermining of the place of race in the Commission’s remit, and in the narrative of equality concerns. The government’s rationale for cutting the strategic grants function further enacts this erasure of race:

We are therefore directing funding over 2012 to 2014 at programmes that provide practical help and support direct to, for example: victims of sexual and domestic violence; women who want to start their own business, including women in rural areas, and disabled people seeking elected office; and work to tackle homophobia and transphobia. Some of this funding will support VCS [voluntary and community sector] organisations and we may make further such funding available. But in the light of the problems with the EHRC’s Strategic Grants programme, we think it better to direct resources at strategic priorities rather than invite locally-based organisations to bid for relatively small sums held centrally. (Government Equalities Office 2012b: 19)



Again, race seems to disappear from the account of what kinds of programme the government will enable the EHRC to support.

The discursive move to individualize equality is further entrenched by the language used to explain proposed changes to the governance of the EHRC:

One factor which has hindered the ability of the EHRC Board and executive team to discharge their functions effectively has been a blurring of roles caused by current Commissioners' dual responsibilities as Board member and 'strand' champion. This dual role has sometimes resulted in tensions between particular interests and corporate imperatives, making it difficult for the EHRC to determine a strong strategic vision and direction and to operate swiftly and decisively. *The intention is that the new Board will have a stronger focus on corporate governance and less of a role in representing the interests of particular groups.* This means that it may want to find different ways of engaging with its key constituencies in the equality and human rights arena. We are therefore working with the EHRC to explore the scope to establish new means through which the EHRC can engage its key partners in its work – for example through a reference group or advisory panel. (Government Equalities Office 2012b: 22, emphasis added)

Here, again, as in the earlier documents laying out the government's overall equality strategy, the association of collective sources of disadvantage with particularistic interests that can get in the way of proper functioning strips away any possibility of talking about equality as something that involves more than individual opportunity. The language of 'strands' evokes the kind of 'tick-box culture' that is set against the possibility of having a strategic vision or of operating decisively. The possibility that a strategic vision might want or need to consider the structural inequalities that congeal around race, or gender, or disability, and so on is disavowed, or at least marginalized to a reference group or advisory panel. Perhaps we begin to see here why the General Duty and the groups-focused Good Relations Duty are seen as so troublesome, as the business of equality is increasingly divested of the responsibility of thinking about what an equal society might require, and is reduced to the corporate imperatives of running an efficient organization.

I believe that what is at stake here, therefore, is more than a restatement of a neo-liberal view of equality that focuses only on the individual,

although it is that. In line with Theresa May's call for a strategy that works with the grain of human nature, that is 'intelligent' rather than bound up in pointless political correctness and social engineering, this is also an appeal to a common-sense view that resists seeing equality as anything other than an anodyne, self-evident truth of which 'we' are all in favour. Since we are all for it, since there is nothing fundamentally political about it (in the sense that it is about power relations), then all that remains is to find the most efficient way of implementing it. Equality is thus neutralized as one corporate objective among others, as something that anyone can easily do with the right management instruments; indeed, *not* having too great a stake in addressing some kind of collective inequality—not being a 'strand champion'—is to be seen as an advantage for operating swiftly and decisively. This is the logic of the 'business case for diversity' first championed under Labour taken to its limit; since equality and diversity are good for everyone, we can all be for them, no one has to give up any structural privilege or advantage in order for equality to happen.

This is also the logic behind 'mainstreaming' which provides the rationale for a number of the government's decisions to strip back the Commission's involvement in advisory and conciliation services and to move away from seeing it as an 'equality regulator'. Advisory services are to be outsourced to 'a new, improved Equality Advisory and Support Service from the private sector or civil society' (Government Equalities Office 2012b). Conciliation services can be handled by the already-existing 'range of good quality, accessible and effective mediation provision already available throughout England and Wales and Scotland' (*ibid.*). Sector-specific regulators such as Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission are already responsible for compliance with the law and protecting the public. The suggestion here is that much of this work is already mainstreamed through other organizations and there is no need for additional institutional involvement by specialized practitioners. This can seem perfectly sensible once the nature of equality work has been neutralized, as discussed above. But, of course, as Sara Ahmed has argued:

the point is that diversity and equality *are* not mainstream and that to treat them *as if* they are simply means the message will not get through. Without an institutional drive, you need those willing to be diversity drivers.

Diversity and equality tend to fall off the agenda unless someone forces them onto the agenda, where that someone is usually the diversity or equality practitioner. Of course as soon as something is forced on the agenda, then it is not mainstream. You do not have to force what is mainstream. Mainstreaming thus fails to describe the kind of work that diversity work involves: having to push for, or drive forward, agendas that organizations are not behind. (Ahmed 2012: 139–140)

This narrative strand develops further when the Government Response document moves on to consider why the EHRC should be seen not as an ‘equality regulator’ but, rather, as a ‘strategic enforcer’:

we have decided that it is neither realistic nor desirable to expect the EHRC to ‘regulate’ every part of society on equality – checking up on organisations as diverse as pubs and shops, housing associations and police forces, central government departments and multi-national corporations. People in Great Britain have strong rights to equal treatment under the Equality Act 2010, and are generally well-placed to assert them, with help available through legal aid and through the new Equality Advisory and Support Service, which will replace the EHRC’s helpline later this year. [...] As a consequence, we think it is more appropriate to regard the EHRC as a strategic enforcer – ensuring the law works as intended and only acting where there is an important point of principle or clarification at stake, which has broader application than its effect on the parties involved. As part of the EHRC’s next triennial review, we will consider whether the arrangements for the enforcement of equality law are appropriate, proportionate, risk-based and fit for purpose. (Government Equalities Office 2012b)

Two things of interest are happening in this paragraph. First, as in the mainstreaming line of argument mentioned earlier, there is no real need for an equality regulator, since people in Great Britain already have strong rights to equal treatment and are well-placed to assert those rights. The basic job of equality is done. But, second, what would an equality regulator look like? It would attempt to ‘regulate’ every part of society—‘checking up on organisations as diverse as pubs and shops, housing associations and police forces, central government departments and multi-national corporations’. Unlike Ofsted or the Care Quality

Commission, or the other sector- or industry-specific regulators, it would be everywhere, poking its politically correct, social engineering nose into every sector of society and every individual's way of life. Here, the government narrative reveals the tension at the heart of its framing; it wants to treat equality as a politically neutral question of service delivery quality, of common sense and practical measures, and yet equality as an object won't easily fit within these discursive constraints. There remains a troubling source of potential excess that can't be mainstreamed away:

because the EHRC's overarching purpose is – in line with our European Union and international obligations – actively to promote equality and human rights, *by definition it is not neutral and impartial*. Its role as a strategic enforcer of the law and supporter of victims of discrimination means that, while it has done some good work to raise awareness of rights and obligations, *it is not seen by many with responsibilities under the law as a trusted provider of pragmatic guidance on how to ensure compliance. Neither is it necessarily well-placed to give guidance which offers practical and appropriate solutions* for the wide range of different employers, businesses, voluntary and public bodies across the economy; in most cases there are other bodies closer to the various sectors which have the skills, expertise and established channels of communication to do this more effectively. We will therefore consider how to improve the support available to help businesses and others comply with equality law, where possible making better use of the skills and experience of those who understand the practical challenges facing different sectors. We want to ensure that the information provided is relevant and appropriate for them and makes use of sources of advice and guidance which they already use and trust – this will make it more effective. (Government Equalities Office 2012b, emphasis added)

So, to be for equality—for its active promotion—one cannot, ultimately, be politically neutral and impartial, and those who actively promote equality will not be seen by 'many with responsibilities under the law' as a trusted provider of pragmatic guidance, or as offering practical and appropriate solutions. Who are these many who do not trust? During the consultation process, it was only in the submission from the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) that this issue of the EHRC's status as a 'neutral and impartial' organization was raised, speaking on

behalf of the business sector. We should not be surprised that this one voice was heard more loudly than others by the Coalition government, but I am more interested in how this statement manages the ‘excess’ of equality that needs to be contained. The active promotion of equality is doubly tainted—it is imposed by external EU and international obligations, and it is not neutral. Only a neutral approach to equality can be trusted by businesses and others who are expected to comply with equality law and, if you are actively for equality, then you are not neutral and cannot be trusted. Equality—or, at least, the version of equality that can be trusted—will be the result not of its active promotion, of an active commitment to equality, of critically identifying the inequalities that require change but, rather, of pragmatic guidance, or practical and appropriate solutions. Effective information on how to enact equality can only come from sources that are already used and trusted—and these, by definition, should not be those who actively promote equality. Those who are for equality will get in the way of enacting equality; they become the obstacles to its realization that must be removed. Ahmed is, again, useful here:

Things might appear fluid if you are going the way things are flowing. When you are not going that way, you experience a flow *as* solidity, as what you come up against. In turn, those who are not going the way things are flowing are experienced *as* obstructing the flow. We might need to be the cause of obstruction. We might need to get in the way if we are to get anywhere. We might need to become the blockage points by pointing out the blockage points. (Ahmed 2012: 186–187)

My point here is not to defend the EHRC as a perfect organization, or as the only vehicle through which equality work can be done; neither is it to argue that the terms under which the EHRC was formed were problem-free. As I have argued elsewhere (Gedalof 2013), the framing of equality in the Commission’s founding contained crucial amenabilities for the further retrenchment now seen post-2010. What I am concerned with is how the occasion of the review of the EHRC was used to produce an even more limited account of what is meant by equality, an account that is increasingly amenable to a logic of austerity and to the preservation of the

normative ‘flow’ of structural privilege and inequality. We can see the further development of this account of equality in the final document I want to examine in this chapter, the report of the Public Sector Equality Duty Review, which was published in September 2013.

## Act Three: Reviewing the Public Sector Equality Duty

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) formed part of the 2010 Equality Act, which was formulated by the last Labour government, but only implemented after the 2010 election. The PSED, Section 149 of the Act, came into force in April 2011 and is defined in the law as follows:

- (1) A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to —
  - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
  - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
  - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. (Equality Act 2010, [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149). Accessed 4 January 2014)

While the legal language of the Duty uses the fairly anodyne terminology of having ‘due regard’, it has generally been understood by Equality and Diversity practitioners, like its predecessors the Race Equality Duty and the Gender Equality Duty, to signal a more active commitment to promoting equality and eliminating discrimination in the public sector (see, e.g., Equality and Diversity Forum 2013). The PSED was also included in the 2010 Equality Act in order to equalize provision across all nine equality ‘strands’. While still staying very much within the terms of a liberal account of equality of opportunity, and of the business case for

diversity, this understanding of the PSED as going slightly beyond the legal requirement not to discriminate in order to promote equality positively is reflected in the EHRC's explanation of the duty:

The broad purpose of the equality duty is to integrate consideration of equality and good relations into the day-to-day business of public authorities. If you do not consider how a function can affect different groups in different ways, it is unlikely to have the intended effect. This can contribute to greater inequality and poor outcomes.

The general equality duty therefore requires organisations to consider how they could positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations. It requires equality considerations to be reflected into the design of policies and the delivery of services, including internal policies, and for these issues to be kept under review. ([www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty/introduction-to-the-equality-duty/](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty/introduction-to-the-equality-duty/). Accessed 5 January 2014)

When the review of the PSED was announced in May 2012, there was a definite shift in the language used to frame the Duty's purpose, and the terms under which it was to be reviewed. Any suggestion of actively promoting equality is toned down to the more passive language of 'taking account of equality', in the words of the then Equalities Minister Maria Miller (2013), or of 'sensitising public bodies to equality issues', in the words of the Chair of the Review Report (Government Equalities Office 2013: 9). Significantly, I think, the review was announced following the decision to include a 'spotlight' on the 2010 Equality Act as part of the new government's Red Tape Challenge initiative, which invited online submissions from the public to express their opinions and offer solutions on a range of government activities with a view to reducing regulation and bureaucracy:

Good regulation is a good thing. It protects consumers, employees and the environment, it helps build a more fair society and can even save lives. But over the years, regulations – and the inspections and bureaucracy that go with them – have piled up and up. This has hurt business, doing real damage to our economy. And it's done harm to our society too. When people are confronted by a raft of regulations whenever they try to volunteer or

play a bigger part in their neighbourhood, they begin to think they shouldn't bother.

If we want to reverse this trend and encourage greater responsibility in our society, then we have got to trust people and give them more freedom to do the right thing. So this government has set a clear aim: to leave office having reduced the overall burden of regulation. With more than 21,000 regulations active in the UK today, this won't be an easy task – but we're determined to cut red tape. ([www.redtapechallenge.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/about/](http://www.redtapechallenge.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/about/). Accessed 10 January 2014)

Including 'equalities' as a focus for the Red Tape Challenge creates a rhetorical space for tethering equality to bureaucracy, and for further setting up a narrative conflict between intrusive government—pointless political correctness, social engineering, too much 'gold-plated procedure', the burden of regulation—and the freedom of individuals to 'do the right thing'. If equality is such a taken for granted 'right thing' in the UK, as the narratives emerging from the documents discussed above suggest, then equality legislation can be framed in the same terms as any of the other 21,000 active regulations. Most importantly for our purposes here, as in the review of the EHRC, being actively for equality can be construed as an obstacle to its achievement. The narrative arc of the government's vision of equality, from Theresa May's speech onwards, would seem to be heading inexorably towards a resolution in which to speak about equality must also be to speak about bureaucracy.

And so it is that when Equalities Minister Maria Miller introduced the Report of the PSED Review in a ministerial statement in September 2013, she asserted that the original purpose of the introduction of the Duty in 2011 was jointly to:

ensure that public bodies take account of equality when carrying out their day-to-day work – in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees – and to address the bureaucracy associated with the previous duties on race, disability and gender. (Miller 2013:1)

While the original rationale for a single equality duty was to equalize the provisions across all the equality strands, that is reframed here as addressing the bureaucracy associated with the previous duties. Reducing



bureaucracy thus becomes equal in importance to ‘taking account’ of equality. This is repeated in the Chair’s foreword to the Report itself:

When the government implemented the Public Sector Equality Duty in 2011, it was with a clear objective – to ensure public bodies consider equality when carrying out their functions without adding unnecessary processes and bureaucracy. (Government Equalities Office 2013: 6)

Overall, the focus on bureaucracy and the procedural burdens that have followed on from the PSED dominates the report, and the Chair’s introductory summary establishes a narrative tone of disappointment and disapproval:

My colleagues and I were disappointed by some of what we found.

There is undoubtedly support for the principles which underpin the Duty – and some public bodies are doing a good job in mainstreaming equalities considerations in their work. But, in far too many cases, we have uncovered useless bureaucratic practices which do nothing for equality. No-one seems to ask, ‘Could I do less and have the same beneficial effect?’. (Ibid.)

This somewhat hectoring tone is combined with a bit of scaremongering:

In one extreme case I believe emergency services would be better resourced by a reduction in these unnecessary practices – and in another the private sector is unnecessarily burdened by hours if not days of work by ‘requests’ for information from the public sector. (Ibid.)

It is important to note that the examples of ‘extreme cases’ he cites here of what he is ‘disappointed about’ do not actually appear in any identifiable form in the report, and no further details are given; neither is there any account of how representative these might be. But the reader is left with the worrying impression of emergency services not responding to the public because they are too busy engaging in useless bureaucratic procedures and of businesses wasting days of otherwise productive time responding to public sector requests for information, inviting us to agree

with the Chair's conclusion that the government, the EHRC and public bodies themselves must 'act urgently' to turn around this worrying state of affairs (*ibid.*: 7).

More insidious than the rhetoric of alarm, though, is the ways in which this according of narrative precedence to combating bureaucracy is reinforced through the repeated use of a language of burdens in relation to the PSED and the dismissal of any 'benefit' that can't be readily quantified. While there is some recognition in the report that the PSED is about enabling culture change (*ibid.*: 15), something that is not always easily quantifiable, there is nevertheless a relentless attention to the failure of public bodies to demonstrate outcomes that can be measured and monetized in terms of their costs and benefits. This is introduced in the Executive Summary in the following terms:

The phrase 'operating as intended' is key. While the overall aim of a 'due regard' duty is to sensitise public bodies to equality issues, the government's aim in introducing the PSED in its current form is as follows:

- To build on the previous equality duties, to simplify the previous duties and to extend the duty to other protected characteristics;
- To be outcome-focused; and
- To reduce the bureaucracy associated with the previous duties. (*Ibid.*: 9)

and then further developed in the discussion of the 'lack of evidence on costs and benefits':

There is little understanding of costs and benefits even by those most closely involved in implementing the Duty. Despite the current financial climate, we have not found any public bodies that have sought to monetise either the costs or benefits of applying the Duty as a whole (although some have been able to monetise certain aspects of compliance). (*Ibid.*: 10)

Later on in the Report, there is the claim that 'We have heard many reports of generalised benefits which can be ascribed to the duty but, as yet, very few concrete examples of where the PSED has led to improved

outcomes' (ibid.: 15). At the same time, what the Report claims can be fairly unproblematically measured are the burdens the Duty imposes:

The Steering Group has found burdens associated with the implementation of the PSED, which has required new processes. These burdens are not limited to the public sector but may be passed on to private and VCS contractors and to members of the public. (Ibid.: 13)

These are then detailed in relation to procurement, data collection and publication, and the carrying out of Equality Impact Assessments (ibid.: 13–14).

This way of framing the problem of the PSED does a number of things simultaneously. The language of measurable outcomes echoes the resistance to the General Duty of the EHRC—doing equality can and must be reduced to that which is precise, specific and pragmatic. 'Generalized benefits', such as the General Duty, are too woolly to be counted, and therefore to count. Once the political content of equality has been neutralized, what is it but one corporate objective like any other, which can be monitored through measurable benefits and costs? The language of burdens in this framework is, then, always to be constituted as a kind of crisis that needs resolution—if the benefits can't be measured then the costs that can be will always predominate. If the Duty is as much about producing outcomes and reducing bureaucracy as it is about 'sensitizing' the public sector to a diminished version of equality, then the inevitable resolution is that these burdens must be reduced. There is no place in this narrative for considering that, if the Duty were intended to initiate some kind of more deep-reaching cultural change regarding collective sources of inequality, then its new requirements must be in one sense a burden, since they invite practitioners, in Ahmed's term, to 'go against the flow'.

This tragedy in three acts leaves us with an impoverished and thoroughly depoliticized view of equality that will prove highly useful to the narratives of austerity that are to follow. The relentless focus on the individual and resistance to thinking too deeply about collective sources of disadvantage and social positioning, the casting of a too-intrusive state as prime villain getting in the way of the neo-liberal subject's ability to 'do the right thing', the insistent focus on the quantifiable so that all that counts

is what can be counted—these are all features we will see re-emerging in the coming chapters. If, as Bhattacharyya (2015) argues, the austerity project is as much about rationing entitlements as it is about rationing resources, individualizing and neutralizing our understanding of equality is a necessary first step. If the proper role of the state is reduced back down to a minimal formal framework of equality of opportunity, and going against the flow of entrenched inequalities is seen as an unbearable and unnecessary burden, then what we have is a kind of austerity equality. This is an equality strategy that combines an ostensibly positive appeal to its subjects—as a ‘nation of 62 million individuals’ rather than as boxes to be ticked, as people who already believe in equality and in doing the right thing—with its disciplining and disavowing opposite—in which those 62 million individuals must be freed from the excessive burdens of collective bonds and a sense of mutuality. This vision of equality sets the scene for a wider political vision in which differentiated entitlement is normalized and justified (Bhattacharyya 2015: 147), and where entitlement to social support for those who find themselves disadvantaged is always turned back into an assessment of how deserving or undeserving these individuals are. ‘Turning around’ equalities is thus a crucial component of the austerity agenda. In the next chapter, we see how these strategies are turned to one of the centrepieces of Coalition policy, welfare reform.

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# 3

## Doing the Right Thing: Welfare Reform Narratives and the Crafting of Consent

Probably the most visible and vocal symbol of the austerity project under the Coalition government was its set of policies for the radical reform of and reduction in the cost of the social security benefits system. The need for ‘welfare reform’ as it came to be narrated, and to address a perceived crisis of worklessness and dependency, was spearheaded by the former Conservative Party leader, and then Coalition Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith. As we shall see, Duncan Smith had been involved in honing the narrative about ‘welfare dependency’ since at least 2004, when he set up a new think-tank called the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), which produced numerous reports identifying family breakdown, over-reliance on a perverse benefits system and a ‘culture of worklessness’ as the source of a crisis in British society. Welfare reform quickly became the centrepiece of austerity policies under the Coalition, and the ways in which consent for it was crafted is my focus in this chapter.

On Monday, 11 August 2014, Iain Duncan Smith made one of his many speeches lauding the success of his welfare reform policy. Duncan Smith’s speech repeated a narrative that had been a constant since taking

up his post following the 2010 election. As reported by the BBC, Duncan Smith began by saying that:

the policies of the last Labour government led to whole sections of society being left on the sidelines and communities marked by widespread unemployment. The number of households where nobody had ever worked doubled – and the welfare bill rose by twice as much as average earnings. It was clear to me that in large part this situation was the product of a dysfunctional welfare system that often trapped those it was supposed to help in cycles of worklessness and dependency. My one aim as work and pensions secretary has been to change this culture – and everything we have done, every programme we have introduced, has been about supporting everyone who is able to into work. ([www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-28735336](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-28735336). Accessed 12 August 2014)

He further claimed, citing the Deputy Governor of the Bank of England, that the current ‘jobs miracle’ is ‘hugely down to the welfare reforms’ (ibid.).

Writing in *The Guardian* the following day, under the headline ‘Duncan Smith’s Delusional World of Welfare Reform’ (Toynbee 2014), Polly Toynbee calls Duncan Smith the ‘misery man, turning to tricks and magical thinking when flaws in his benefits plans are revealed’ and went on to cite some of the many examples of those—including the National Audit Office, Treasury officials, economists at the National Institute of Economic and Social Research and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation—who have challenged his interpretation of statistics and some of the many accounts from campaigning groups about the disastrous effects of reforms to the benefits system on the sick, the disabled, and both the unemployed and the working poor.

For critics of the welfare reform project, this call and response refrain has now become familiar. Toynbee, together with her colleagues at *The Guardian*—such as Patrick Wintour, Shiv Malik, Amelia Gentleman, Peter Walker and Zoe Williams—has been exemplary in countering the Duncan Smith narrative as it had emerged since the very early days of the Coalition government, challenging the use and interpretation of statistics about the extent of social security spending and the stigmatization of benefit claimants as feckless scroungers. At a time when large parts of the

media were willing to rehearse the government's claims uncritically and use the same language of scrounging and a 'broken Britain' as were repeatedly used in government policy pronouncements, this counter-journalism has been an important strategy of challenging the claims made in defence of reform, and of presenting an alternative account of what is happening.

But it would seem that this is not enough—countering one narrative with another, important as it is, does not appear to have had the desired effect. As Patrick Wintour reflected in *The Guardian* in July 2014, Duncan Smith's reforms, even if 'leaving the Treasury, the National Audit Office and Major Projects Authority exasperated' remained popular. Even if implementation of each of the individual reforms—such as Universal Credit, the Work Programme, or the Personal Independence Payment (PIP)—was in chaos, 'in the public mind, his reforms, such as the cap on welfare benefits, work' (Wintour 2014b).

This is one of the central dilemmas I aim to explore in this chapter. Despite the almost unending fiasco of Duncan Smith's tenure in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)—with one failure after another in terms of implementation, and the wealth of research showing how cuts to benefits spending disproportionately affect women, racialized communities and the disabled—public support for the project of 'welfare reform' remained high. Public opinion polls over the years of the Coalition regularly claimed between 60% and 70% support for statements such as that welfare payments are too generous, that the welfare system is 'broken', that too many people were able to claim benefits that they shouldn't be entitled to, and that a cap on benefits is a good thing ([www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/politics/4876917/Brits-say-benefits-are-too-generous.html](http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/politics/4876917/Brits-say-benefits-are-too-generous.html). Accessed 7 April 2013). People would appear to have believed the government narrative and, perhaps more importantly, to identify with the position being crafted for them by that narrative. A YouGov survey published by the Trades Union Congress in January 2013, for example, found that, on average, people believed that 41% of the social security budget was spent on unemployment, while the real figure was 3%, and that 27% of the budget was spent on fraudulent claims, whereas the real figure was 0.7% (Gentleman 2013). A *Guardian* leader in June 2014 reflected on the views expressed in the 2013 Social



Attitudes Survey: 'Where spending on health and education retain strong support, the proportion who think more should be spent on jobless benefits has fallen from a third in the early 1980s to less than one in 10 now. More than half think unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted one, and an astonishing 80% think people fiddle their claims' (*The Guardian*, 20 June 2014). In their book *Hard Times: The Divisive Toll of the Economic Slump*, Tom Clark and Anthony Heath (2014) examine the ways in which the 'scroungers and strivers' discourse penetrates benefit claimants themselves, pitting those on Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Employment Support Allowance (ESA) against those on Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) or in the Work Programme, dividing social tenants from private tenants, small families from larger families.

As worryingly, there were signs that mainstream political opposition to Coalition policy nevertheless shared significant parts of its basic logic. For example, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), which styles itself as 'the UK's leading progressive think-tank' ([www.ippr.org/](http://www.ippr.org/)), published a report in June 2014 entitled *The Condition of Britain*, which focused on 'structural changes recognising that austerity requires reform of public services, not more spending' (Wintour 2014a). Wintour reads this as a 'switch away from materialism', citing the emphasis on social equality and how we relate to each other as citizens as mattering as much as material equality in closing the gap between rich and poor, and cites this extract from the report: 'Excessive reliance on cash transfers to raise incomes has the effect of *leaving people dependent on the spending preferences of the government of the day rather than experiencing the respect and dignity that comes from earning a living*' (ibid., emphasis added). As we shall see, there are important resonances here with the narrative that pits dependency on the state against the moral value of work, through which the Coalition argument for welfare reform was constructed.

At the level of rhetoric, we see the embedding of the language of scroungers and strivers on both sides of political debate. The then Labour leader Ed Miliband, having enthusiastically taken up the battle on behalf of the 'hard working families' of the 'squeezed middle' drew on the language of scroungers in his campaign against corporation tax avoidance, warning Google that it makes company directors look 'as socially

irresponsible as a benefit claimant who does not genuinely look for work' (Wintour and Syal 2013). On one level, this is a clever reversal of the rhetoric, one that is used by many opposed to massive state cuts as the solution to the crisis caused by big banks. But on another level, of course, this language repeats and reproduces the equivalence between claiming benefits and scrounging. The IPPR report, like a number of Labour commentators, argued for restoring an element of the contributory principle to unemployment benefit, paying variable rates depending on how long one has worked, and therefore paid national insurance. A *Guardian* leader commenting on the report, significantly sub-titled 'the giving and getting back society', argued that this would speak to the public's sense of fairness and 'who deserves what' (*The Guardian* 20 June 2014). The phrase 'giving and getting back' concedes the ground to the Coalition narrative of a 'something for nothing' culture that has become too pervasive, suggesting that the argument about what constitutes fairness has already been won. To this should be added also the relentless shift in language across the political spectrum from 'social security' to 'welfare', as noted by Baroness Hollis in a debate in the Lords in 2011: 'Until recently, when we introduced a bill like this it would not have been a welfare reform bill, it would have been a social security bill. The gap between social security and welfare is precisely the gap between entitlement and stigma' (Williams 2013).

How does a narrative that is so blatantly at odds with large parts of reality come to sustain such popular support? There is something to be said for the power of repetition, of course, and the relentless support this narrative has had from much of the UK media. For example, in April 2013, *The Guardian* published an analysis of the language used by government when discussing benefits and welfare. It noted that every speech by Iain Duncan Smith on benefits in the preceding 12 months had referred to 'a mass culture of welfare dependency' and also noted his regular use of the phrases 'entrenched and intergenerational worklessness and welfare dependency.' In the year to 1 April, he had used the term 'dependency' 38 times, 'entrenched' 15 times and 'addiction' 41 times. 'Fraud' was mentioned 85 times in Department for Work and Pensions press releases. The regular reference to families where three generations had never worked is also noted, despite the lack of evidence that such families exist in any significant numbers. Government rhetoric is then reproduced

by the media, so that in the same period the term ‘benefit cheat’ was used 442 times in national newspapers (Walker 2013). As Imogen Tyler has argued, citing the work of Stuart Hall, the hardening of public opinion into consent relies on the repetition and accumulation of expressions and beliefs ‘on the street’ (Tyler 2013: 211), and certainly both government and media have used the power of repetition to construct welfare reform as an urgent necessity.

But repetition is not the only rhetorical device at work, and more careful attention to the ways in which the narrative of welfare reform has been crafted can also tell us something about how it works to elicit processes of identification and disavowal from its audience. As discussed in the Introduction, Tyler and others have written about the relentless stigmatization that accompanies the push for welfare reform and there is no doubt that successfully stigmatizing particular groups or categories of people is one part of the way in which an unreflexive common sense is produced. Tyler has written about the generation of consent through fear and anxiety (2013: 8), and the production of a series of ‘national objects’ that cut deep into popular consciousness, that ‘do the dirty ideological work of neoliberalism’, by being ‘transformed into symbolic and material scapegoats for the social decomposition effected by market deregulation that has a negative, degrading impact upon us all’ (ibid.: 211) But Tyler also notes that ‘what is peculiar to our times are the ways in which the language of democracy, fairness and equality are used to *justify* the channelling of public hostilities towards vulnerable and/or disadvantaged populations’ (2013: 212). I think it is important that we look simultaneously at both these processes, and at how stigmatization is consistently accompanied by the more ‘positive’ appeal to an intended audience as both reasonable and fair actors. We need to be attentive to the ways in which the permission to stigmatize occurs through an appeal to a sense of fairness and reasonableness, qualities that have been as relentlessly evoked in the Coalition discourse, as have been the invitations to disavow the skiving, scrounging, idling other.

As mentioned earlier, the contours of this narrative about the need for reform of the welfare system can be traced to a series of documents produced by the CSJ. Beginning in 2006, with five reports under the heading ‘Breakdown Britain’ which looked at issues of indebtedness,

educational failure, addiction, fractured families and economic dependence, the now-familiar case began to be made for viewing Britain as a 'broken society' with a moral crisis of welfare dependency and family breakdown at its heart. The articulation of a narrative arc of crisis and resolution is then further elaborated in a companion set of documents under the heading 'Breakthrough Britain' produced in 2007 and 2008, making the case for radical reform of the welfare system as the solution. Key to my purposes in this chapter are the 2007 report *Breakthrough Britain: Economic Dependency and Worklessness*, and the follow-up report in 2009, *Dynamic Benefits: Towards Welfare that Works*. The story crafted in these two reports is then faithfully reproduced in the post-election policy documents of the Department for Work and Pensions, led by the same Iain Duncan Smith—first, the consultation document *21st Century Welfare* (July 2010) and, then, the White Paper *Universal Credit: Welfare that Works* (November 2010), and it is on these four documents that I focus in the following sections. As Jay Wiggan has argued, policy documents such as these are involved in 'the crafting and selling of a repackaged neo-liberal vision of welfare reform', a vision that 'is an exercise in misdirection and revivification' (Wiggan 2012: 385). Wiggan offers important insights into the discursive strategies that are deployed in these documents, but I think there is more to be said about how the formal properties of narrative work to produce this account of welfare reform. I begin by tracing the contours of the narrative arc of crisis and resolution that is embedded in these documents, then move on to look at the dynamics of address that are mobilized, before paying particular attention to the ways in which gender and the reproductive are put into play within this narrative. In Chap. 4, I will discuss how the narrative of welfare reform impacts more specifically on disability, and how it feeds into the crafting of an account of the disabled person as a benefit scrounger.

## Something for Nothing: Crisis and Resolution

All four of the documents under discussion reproduce the same account of a crisis that is caused by a welfare system that produces a 'something for nothing' culture of worklessness. I think it is worth noting from the

start how the persistent use of the term ‘worklessness’, as opposed to unemployment, sets a stage for the framing of the problem as tied to inherent qualities of individuals rather than any structural issues, such as the lack of available jobs. Somehow, to be workless—so close in its resonance to worthless—suggests a failure of character or ambition, a passive state of being, as compared with being unemployed, which can more easily be interpreted as having been actively deprived of employment. While both are generally socially evaluated as negative terms, worklessness opens a linguistic space of equivalence to other currently common terms of stigmatization—such as feckless and shameless—which are repeatedly used to problematize benefit claimants (see Tyler 2013; Jensen and Tyler 2015). The delineation of the crisis then proceeds to argue that worklessness and dependency on the state has become a lifestyle choice for too many, which saps the moral worth, health and economic productivity of the nation. The crisis is defined repeatedly as *structural*—but meaning, here, the structure of the welfare system—rather than as relating to the economic system, or to structural relations of class, gender, and so on, and as requiring fundamental culture change, thus marshalling the language of radical transformation and forward-looking progress in order to elicit support for the proposed solution. In January 2014, for example, Iain Duncan Smith likened welfare reform to William Wilberforce’s ‘historic mission’ to end slavery (Holehouse 2014). As Wiggan notes, the foregrounding of Duncan Smith in the project of welfare reform, and the personal narrative about his ‘awakening’ to the ‘problem of poverty and the consequent transformative effect this has had on Conservative attitudes to poverty and unemployment provides a useful hook on which to sell reforms of social security’ (Wiggan 2012: 386). Duncan Smith’s self-presentation as the born-again campaigner for his particular version of social justice, exemplified in his founding of the CSJ, add to the tone of reforming zeal with which the narrative on welfare reform has been crafted.

The crisis is further exacerbated, so the narrative goes, by the fact that the welfare system contains perverse incentives that lead to family breakdown and non-normative family formations, which further sap moral worth and reproduce worklessness across generations. Dependency on the state is, then, posited as causing (and not only being correlated with)

poor health and even disability itself, a crucial step to producing the disabled person as benefit scrounger, as we shall see in Chap. 4. Crucial to this crisis resolution arc, as it was with the equalities strategy explored in Chap. 2, is to cast the new policies as a decisive break with the New Labour past, even while it builds on amenities from New Labour's turn to more punitive policies on welfare (see Wiggan 2012, for a fuller discussion of this).

We can see all these elements of the arc of crisis and resolution emerging in the first pages of the 2007 document *Breakthrough Britain: Volume 2, Economic Dependency and Worklessness*, (Centre for Social Justice 2007). The Executive Summary makes a series of statements about the nature of the crisis:

Back-to-work support is failing, and the benefits system is trapping people in poverty and part-time, low pay, low prospect jobs – particularly people with significant and multiple labour market disadvantages. The benefits system also acts as a disincentive to family formation that leads to the best outcomes for children: (married) couple families. For the most vulnerable people in society their lives, and the life chances of their children, have got worse.

Economic dependency on the state in turn perpetuates social exclusion and contributes to poor health, as well as negatively impacting on the life chances of the children in workless households. Weak work expectations have made a life on benefits a choice, regardless of an individual's capacity for work. These weak work expectations have driven the attitudes of not just those out of work, but also of those whose job it is to help them. By not expecting people who can work to do so, the Government is failing the very people it claims to be helping.

Not only are the Government's programmes less effective than a number of private and third sector providers, but they are also more expensive. Some of the best practice outsourced programmes cost half the amount of Government programmes and achieve double the outcomes. (Centre for Social Justice 2007: 4–5)

In this framing of the crisis, four points are key. First, that it is the benefits system itself which has created the problem, and that the prevailing degree of 'worklessness' can be read off the nature of state intervention

without reference to the availability of sustainable jobs or the state of the economy, because it is that state intervention which encourages the reliance on benefits as a lifestyle choice. Second, that dependency on the state in itself can be definitively tied to social exclusion and poor health both for the 'workless' and their children, thus perpetuating these problems across generations. Third, that the state is perversely encouraging non-normative family formations, with disastrous results. Fourth, that the private sector will do better than the public sector in addressing these problems, thus suggesting that part of the solution is to retract the role of the state in favour of private providers, in part because it will do a better job more cheaply, but also because the overwhelming presence of the state in the lives of this problematic population is what has created the problem in the first place.

Three principles of the solution to this crisis are then articulated, and these have remained constant through all the materials produced by the Department for Work and Pensions in its development of welfare reform:

*Work is the key route out of poverty for virtually all working-age households*

- **Being part of a working household is the best and most sustainable route out of poverty.** It also decreases the likelihood of future generations living in poverty and dependent on benefits, and has the potential to increase their wage levels.

*Family structure is vital for both adults and children*

- **Committed (married) couple families with at least one working member** lead to the best outcomes for both children and adults, reduce the likelihood of economic dependency on the state, and therefore benefit society as a whole.

*State assistance is fundamental, for those who truly cannot work*

- This must be set at a level that ensures those in receipt of it are supported to a level appropriate for them to participate fully in society. (Centre for Social Justice 2007: 6, emphasis in the original)

On one level, much of what is embedded in these three principles is unremarkable and appeals to a strong common sense understanding of what is fair—people who can work, should work, should be the main source of providing for their families, and only if they really can't work should the state provide assistance. But both common sense and fairness need to be constructed and we need to pay attention to what needs to be left out as well as what is included in their crafting. The first of these assertions takes no account of the prevalence of the working poor, who make up a significant proportion of benefits claimants, and whose reliance on state assistance is due more to the structural limitations of a capitalist economy to provide people with a satisfactory living wage than it is to a reliance on welfare as a lifestyle choice. The second signals an intention to tether welfare reform to a championing of marriage, which will be considered in more detail later in this chapter for its implications in relation to a normative view of gender relations. The third offers a gesture of support, but that support is conditional on the evaluative power to define worthiness (those who 'truly' cannot work) and to determine the grounds upon which what it means to participate in society are defined.

These principles are then followed by results from a YouGov poll. I quote this section at length because the framing of the poll questions is so revealing of how a particular narrative of the present can be crafted, in which particular ways of making sense of a situation are not so much reflected as produced through the language that is used. The poll wording also suggests that key elements of the discourse on welfare reform were being set long before the Coalition came to power in 2010:

- 91 per cent of people polled agreed that **'Living on benefits should not be a way of life'**
- 86 per cent of people polled agreed that **'The benefits system should be a 'something for something' system. If people receive benefits it is reasonable to require them to seek work'**
- 87 per cent of people polled agreed that **'Lone parents and disabled people capable of working should be encouraged to do so'**
- 80 per cent of people polled agreed that **'It is reasonable to expect that disabled people and people with health conditions should work if they are able to do so'**



- 71 per cent of people polled agreed that **‘It is reasonable to expect that lone parents work part-time once their youngest child is 5 years old, and full-time once their youngest child is in secondary school’**
- 71 per cent of people polled agreed that **‘Within the benefits system there should not be a financial disincentive against couples living together’**
- 70 per cent of people polled agreed that **‘The benefits system should not penalise married or co-habiting couples, even if it means giving a single person half the benefits of a couple’**
- 79 per cent of people polled agreed that **‘People should be able to keep at least 50p in every extra pound they earn’**
- 88 per cent of people polled agreed that **‘The benefits system should be simplified’**
- 70 per cent of people polled agreed that **‘Support for people should not be determined by the benefit that they are on; a more holistic approach is needed to ensure all are helped into work’**
- 75 per cent of people polled agreed that **‘Many private and voluntary sector organisations have a success rate at getting people back to work double that of the government programmes. If they are more successful we should let them do more’**. (Centre for Social Justice 2007: 7, emphasis in the original)

While the language of the poll questions already introduces some of the key stigmatizing terms that have marked the narrative on welfare reform—the presumption that living on benefits is a way of life for too many, that a something for nothing culture is widespread—much more of it is framed as a positive appeal to fairness and reasonableness, to supporting success and rewarding positive behaviour. This is actually the more insidious part of the narrative, because it invites its intended reader to agree that they already know what is right and fair, that they are the people who already do the right thing, and that they need nothing other than their own common sense understanding of the world to agree with the project of welfare reform. As in the narrative on equality discussed in Chap. 2, where there is the production of a ‘public’ who already know what equality is and who don’t need to go against the flow of common

sense in order to preserve it, here the reader is invited to occupy a set of self-evidently reasonable positions that require no questioning of the normative stances that are embedded in them—that work is always available and desirable regardless of one’s circumstances, that couples living together is always a good thing, and that access to state support is not a collective entitlement of citizens but, rather, entitles the state to set the norms by which claiming individuals are to live.

Once that common sense understanding has been consolidated, it follows that those who nevertheless resist doing the right thing are in urgent need of being taken in hand. The reasonable reader will surely agree that there truly is a crisis that urgently needs attention, a crisis that is blighting individual lives and encouraging self-harming behaviours, and the documents repeatedly mobilize the language of radical, structural change to address this. In the Foreword to the 2010 consultation document *21st Century Welfare* (Department for Work and Pensions 2010a), Iain Duncan Smith writes:

The only way to make a sustainable difference is by tackling *the root causes* of poverty: family breakdown; educational failure; drug and alcohol addiction; severe personal indebtedness; and economic dependency.

We are going to end *the culture of worklessness and dependency* that has done so much harm to individuals, families and whole communities. Our aim is to *change forever a system that has too often undermined work and the aspiration that goes with it*.

By actively putting work at the centre of working-age support we want to *create a new contract with the British people*, which is why we are consulting them in this paper. We will help them to find work and make sure work pays when they do. They in return will be expected to seek work and take work when it is available. No longer will we leave people for years on long-term benefits without contact or support. This contract is about a responsible society working together to improve the quality of life for those who are worst off. (Department for Work and Pensions 2010a: 1, emphasis added)

Here, what urgently needs attention is the relationship between the state and individuals. The root causes of poverty have nothing to do with socio-economic structures, they all relate to bad individual choices and

individual failure—family breakdown, educational underachievement, addiction, indebtedness and dependency, and to a state system which enables such bad individual choices. The state has been complicit in producing this culture of worklessness and dependency, and it is the role of the state to change itself and thereby craft a new contract with individual citizens. The only system that really needs changing—but which needs to be changed forever—is the system of welfare benefits. As Wacquant (2009) has argued in relation to the neo-liberal welfare reform project, what is at stake here, then, is not simply a retraction of the state but, rather, a reframing of the state from ‘kindly nanny state to strict daddy state’ (2009: 290) —a remasculinization of the state that emphasizes duties over rights, sanction over support, a stern rhetoric of the obligations of citizenship, and that positions state managers as virile protectors of the society against its wayward members. At the same time, the historic sense of the welfare state as a recognition of the ‘categorical entitlement’ of its citizenry is replaced with ‘an individual contract between recipient and state’ (Wacquant 2009: 100–101). As the CSJ argued in 2007, referring to the last Labour government:

For those temporarily out of work, we should provide a safety net, but with a clear link between what the state expects of the individual and what the individual is entitled to in return. The current culture of ‘something for nothing’ must be ended. The receipt of benefits should not be seen as an entitlement, and should not be a lifestyle choice. The Government frequently uses the rhetoric of a ‘something for something’ system, but has failed to implement an effective one. (Centre for Social Justice 2007: 90)

Note here the equivalence between a notion of entitlement and benefits as a lifestyle choice. Any sense that ‘entitlement’ to social support might be understood in more collective terms, as a result of an acknowledgement of what Bhattacharyya calls the ‘implied national family of mutuality’ (Bhattacharyya 2015: 99) is foreclosed. Her use of the family metaphor is fitting since, as we shall see below, a preoccupation with family forms is intrinsic to the narrative’s fashioning of the good citizen. But what we need to register here is that the resolution of the perceived crisis involves the specific targeting of the concept of entitlement itself, which,

as Bhattacharyya argues, ‘arises only with the possibility of imagining mutuality among human beings’ (ibid.). By casting the sense of entitlement as always a problem, the idea of social rights for all citizens—not just the ‘undeserving’, but also those who already do the right thing—is diminished. The good citizen is one who asks for nothing, or at least very little. For the rest, all that is available is an arrangement between a sanctioning state and the wayward individual.

The DWP documents are clear about the need to change individual behaviours, and that the state should play a deliberate role in effecting behavioural change. In *21st Century Welfare*, the case is made that welfare reform needs to be ‘designed to produce positive behavioural effects; such structural reforms could enable us to deliver some fundamental changes to ensure that work always pays and is clearly seen to pay’ (Department for Work and Pensions 2010a: 2). It goes on, ‘Successive governments have made well-intentioned but piecemeal reforms to the system. None have succeeded in tackling the fundamental structural problems that undermine personal responsibility and the effectiveness of welfare’ (ibid.: 4). In *Universal Credit*, we see a similar commitment to using welfare reform in order to support ‘in the long-run, the reinforcement of pro-work social norms’ (Department for Work and Pensions 2010b: 59) and to be quite unashamed in its marshalling of the normative language of ‘social engineering’ that we saw disavowed in relation to equalities policy in Chap. 2:

Looking further ahead, the reduction in workless households should act to reduce worklessness further as a culture of work becomes the norm amongst a greater number of households and communities.

Although the number of workless households will reduce, it is possible that, in some families, second earners may choose to reduce or rebalance their hours or to leave work. In these cases, the improved ability of the main earner to support his or her family will increase the options available for families to strike their preferred work/life balance. (Department for Work and Pensions 2010b: 60)

I will return to the issue of consolidating normative family forms implied in the second of these statements below; here, it is the role of the

neo-liberal state in inciting its individual citizens to take personal responsibility for their lives that is my focus, together with the political grammar of address through which this inciting is organized.

## The Politics of Address

Wacquant's 'daddy state' is evident in the language of sanctions as a means of re-educating benefit claimants into becoming more responsible self-actualizing subjects:

We will require every Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance recipient to have a *claimant commitment*. The commitment will set out our *general expectations of recipients*, and the requirements placed upon them; it will also be clear about the consequences for the recipient of failing to meet these agreed standards. This will be carried forward into Universal Credit.

Having strong and clear sanctions are critical *to incentivise benefit recipients to meet their responsibilities*. Currently, we believe that some sanctions are set at too low a level and the consequences of failing to comply with requirements are not always clear. We will introduce a new sanctions structure to apply across Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance, and Income Support. (Department for Work and Pensions 2010b: 28)

This recasting of the social contract between individual and the state is supported by a language of division of the population into those who give and those who take. Those who need to be re-educated into responsible citizenship are separated off from those who are already there, who already 'do the right thing' and subscribe to the 'something for something' culture. The individualizing of the root causes of poverty means that the space for considering inequalities of wealth, resources and opportunity in social or systemic terms has been foreclosed and, with it, any space for a redistributive argument. Instead, as we shall see, those 'who have' are cast as 'having' entirely through their own sense of responsibility and effort, and what they have must not be threatened in any way:

To be effective and sustainable, public investment in tackling poverty must be about more than transferring money from those who have to those who have not.

We cannot continue with spending on welfare that all too often has a negative, rather than a positive, impact. Its complexity and poor financial incentives to work are key factors in trapping people on out-of-work benefits. The long-term effect on our society is particularly worrying given that a higher proportion of children grow up in a workless household in the UK than in almost any other EU country and children growing up in disadvantaged families are more likely to be disadvantaged themselves. (Department for Work and Pensions 2010b: 11)

Indeed, according to this narrative, the prevailing economic structures are perfectly adequate to provide the opportunities for all to play a full part, to get out what they put in; all that is required are the proper incentives to make those still stuck in dependency to see those possibilities:

The Government wants to create a welfare system that provides people with the confidence and security to play a full part in society through a flexible labour market within a competitive modern economy. Progress has been made over the past 20 years. Britain is internationally recognised as having some of the most effective labour market policies in the world, helping people, including those previously written off as ‘inactive’ in the labour market, to move off benefits and into work through conditionality and support. We need to bring the parts of the system that are not working up to the level of the best. (Department for Work and Pensions 2010b: 12)

The flexible labour market (the structure of the economy) is good, is providing opportunity; what is bad is those who don't participate in it, who refuse to take those opportunities: a proper welfare system will serve that labour market demand for flexibility while also inculcating good behaviour. Much is made across all of these documents of the need for a more ‘dynamic’ benefit system that will not disadvantage those that work a bit more, and the need to adjust the ‘taper’ through which benefits are withdrawn when claimants begin to take on additional hours of work (see, e.g., Department for Work and Pensions 2010b: 15; Wiggan 2012: 393–394 for a critique). As is argued in *Universal Credit*, ‘[h]ence,

Universal Credit will match more closely the structure of today's labour market, where part-time jobs and flexible working are much more common than they once were. Furthermore, this reform will increase the range of viable jobs in the economy' (Department for Work and Pensions 2010b: 55). This makes more explicit that part of the motivation for welfare reform is to keep people available for the demands of a system that, via zero hours contracts and the like (Mason 2014), keeps people in precarity instead of giving them proper, predictable jobs with acquired rights (see also Bhattacharyya 2015; Wiggan 2012). As Wacquant has argued, such reforms of the welfare system have as their intention 'not to fight poverty and alleviate social insecurity but to normalise them' in ways that involve turning the state away from passively protecting the poor to 'actively making them into compliant workers fit or forced to fill the peripheral slots of the deregulated labour market' (Wacquant 2009: 101). Welfare reform is then seen as a forceful intervention into the economy that involves reshaping the dispositions of recipients through intensive 'moral rearmament', degrading the recipient self and glorifying the working self, elevating work to 'absolute civic duty' and pressing 'the poor into substandard slots of unskilled labour market, increasing the supply of pliable workers and intensifying the desocialization of wage work'—a task, Wacquant reminds us, 'which is indivisibly material and symbolic' (ibid.).

It is the work at the level of the symbolic which is my focus here, and we can see this symbolic division of the population between those who do the right thing and those who need to be re-educated away from doing the wrong thing in the language of Chancellor George Osborne's April 2013 speech, where welfare reforms:

are about making sure we use every penny we can to back hard-working people who want to get on in life. This month we will make work pay. For too long we've had a system where people who did the right thing – who get up in the morning and work hard – felt penalised for it, while people who did wrong things got rewarded for it. That's wrong.

Defending benefits that trap people in poverty and penalise work is defending the indefensible. The benefit system is broken; it penalises those who try to do the right thing and the British people badly want it fixed. We agree – and those who don't are on the wrong side of the British public. (Wintour 2013a)

This resonates with Wacquant's observation, drawing on Durkheim, that 'punishment is a communicative device, a language delivering messages not so much to offenders as to the witnessing public, in this case the working citizenry. For them, the punitive makeover of social policy signifies without equivocation that nobody can opt out of wage labour without exposing themselves to a material and symbolic degradation worse than the most demeaning job. And it reminds all that you must count on no one but yourself in a society subordinated to the market' (Wacquant 2009: 108–109). In statements such as Osborne's and Duncan Smith's, there is a clear reaching out to a 'witnessing public' of working citizens who rely on themselves alone, a discursive reaching out that is, at the same time, a production of that responsible, self-reliant public and their wrong-doing other.

This is the production of a discourse also in the sense that language and material practices converge to produce 'truths'. Alongside the relentless language of worklessness and dependency of the undeserving poor, was a growing popularity in the Coalition government of behavioural economics via its 'nudge unit', a Cabinet Office team tasked with devising schemes that will 'nudge' the recalcitrant into better behaviour. The unit was responsible for at least one controversy with its devising of a bogus psychometric test piloted with jobseekers in 2013 (Malik 2013). The point here is that, in its own terms, the important thing was getting claimants to take the test, rather than any useful knowledge about job prospects and aptitudes the test might reveal. Submitting to the test, making oneself a subject of surveillance by and disciplining through the test, takes claimants down the road to refashioning themselves, in Wacquant's terms, 'not as citizens participating in a community of equals, but as subjects saddled with abridged rights and expanded obligations until such time as they will have demonstrated their full commitment to the values of work and family by their reformed conduct' (2009: 98). The piloting of schemes like compulsory attendance for jobseekers at Job Centres for 35 hours per week, or the increasing reliance on 'aid in kind' such as food stamps (Butler 2013), or on food banks by local councils, does the same work of constructing a narrative through practice, a narrative in which the benefit recipient is a deficient agent who needs to be constantly surveilled, who



can't be trusted with money, who needs to be taken in hand and re-educated—an infantilizing and diminishing discourse that harks back to the times of the Poor Laws.

## Gender and the Championing of Marriage

The tying of welfare reform to particular and normative family forms is something that has been a constant theme since the establishment of the CSJ, which has always had a twin focus on 'family breakdown' and welfare reform as part of its research and advocacy agenda. As we shall see in Chap. 5, the definition of 'social justice' itself that is at the heart of its work is intimately associated with the project of identifying and regulating 'troubled families'. This concern with shoring up the traditional family was also very much part of the Conservative policy agenda within the Coalition, both in relation to welfare reform and more broadly. In August 2014, Prime Minister David Cameron announced a new 'family test', aimed at ensuring that 'every domestic policy is examined for its impact on the family' (Watt 2014). While Cameron's championing of the family was partially framed as a step on from the moralizing stance of the 'broken Britain' rhetoric that we see in the documents under discussion here, with praise for 'inspirational single parents', his speech nevertheless rehearses the familiar refrain that strong families are the bedrock of instilling good social values, and that 'long before you get to the welfare state, it is family that is there to care for you when you are sick or when you fall on hard times' (*The Guardian*, 19 August 2014).

Much of this focus on the normative family is not new—concern that, for example, single mothers would find themselves 'married to the state' rather than a male head of household and provider has long been a preoccupation of welfare policy, and their most recent stigmatization as abjected 'chav mums' has been analysed by Tyler (2008, 2013) and others. Wacquant's characterization of the neo-liberal welfare state as a shift from nanny state to daddy state suggests that the dynamics of normative gender have always underpinned conceptualizations of welfare policy. From its beginnings with Sir William Beveridge in the post-World War II period, the modern British welfare state has always been underpinned by

a particular understanding of the normative and gendered family (Lewis 1992; Pascall 2012). As a public intervention into the notionally private and always highly gendered reproductive sphere, welfare policy is necessarily entangled with prevailing gendered norms. It is therefore not surprising that a narrative of welfare reform that sees too much state support as generating a crisis of dependency will also turn its attention to how that dependency unsettles normative gender and its delineation of public and private spheres. If the state is to be recalibrated from reproductive nanny to rule-setting virile daddy, then it also needs the private reproductive sphere of the family to fall into line.

Both the CSJ and DWP documents are adamant in their insistence that the benefits system encourages unstable families and, through this, contributes to reproducing poverty across generations. This narrative thread is built up through a combination of 'neutral' statistical evidence and affect-laden appeals to common-sense understanding. There is actually little of the direct stigmatizing of non-normative family forms that Tyler and others have so incisively identified in the popular debate, or that has been taken up by the tabloid press in support of welfare reform. It is mainly left to the tabloids and to individual MPs to add an extra layer of outrage at shameless single mothers and feckless fathers. So, among many similar headlines in the *Daily Express*, we see 'Get Pregnant for benefits: Outrage as shameless mum tells daughter have baby for welfare' (16 April 2014) and 'Exclusive: Britain's most shameless dad pockets £500 K on benefits and still won't work' (21 June 2014), while the Conservative MP for Monmouth, David T.C. Davies, is quoted as saying that 'feckless fathers should be put in chains and made to work to pay back society the costs of bringing up their children' (Wintour 2013b). By contrast, the tone of the CSJ and DWP documents is more subtle, if no less relentless, in crafting a cause and effect relationship between unstable families and persistent poverty, and then between the welfare system and unstable families.

The CSJ document *Economic Dependency and Worklessness* (2007) does this, first, by citing a wide range of research correlating marriage and two-parent families with better outcomes in income, health and well-being, and the converse correlation between single-parent families and poverty, worklessness, educational failure, alcohol and drug

problems, and debt (Centre for Social Justice 2007: 22–24). While acknowledging that causal links, as opposed to a correlation, are harder to substantiate (ibid.: 24) the document nevertheless glosses over this debate and repeatedly asserts that ‘stable family structures’, most often elided with marriage, are key to positive economic and social outcomes, and, importantly, to enhancing those qualities that lead people to be *interdependent*, rather than dependent on the state (ibid.: 23). Emphasizing the normative view of household gender relations that underpins this account, the document goes on:

Moreover, married couples are more likely to specialise in their household roles than unmarried couples, partly due to the greater sense of investing in a long term relationship [...]. This means that the committed couple family model can better support a mutually agreed choice that there be one worker and one non-worker (for example whilst children are small). (Centre for Social Justice 2007: 23)

Having established this evidence, the document goes on to draw out the policy implications:

Therefore we must ensure that policies support stable families, rather than encourage arrangements that are more likely to be associated with poverty. (Centre for Social Justice 2007: 22)

If there is evidence that family structure has a significant impact on the outcomes of both children and adults, then policy should reflect this and *encourage patterns of family formation that correlate with positive outcomes*. The weight of international evidence indicates that stable families, usually those based on marriage, are most likely to *lead to independence from the state*, and benefit policies which discourage the formation of these require reform. (Centre for Social Justice 2007: 24, emphasis added)

The document is careful to add that ‘Our proposals [...] do not promote marriage at the expense of single parents, who do a very difficult job, usually with far fewer resources than couple families’ but, in effect, they are doing exactly this, because the single parent is constructed as, at best, an unwilling victim of circumstances beyond her control:

As Alison Garnham, from the National Council for One Parent Families points out ‘for many, lone parenthood is not a lifestyle choice,’ lone parents rarely choose their status, enjoy raising children on their own, or want their own children to become lone parents themselves. ( Centre for Social Justice 2007: 24)

So, those who go with the flow of arranging themselves in the normative family are happier, healthier, wealthier, and, as a bonus, stay independent of the state, because they manage the unpaid work of social reproduction and caring between themselves. This is not surprising, since we live in a socio-economic system set up precisely to work in this way, and for which those who fall outside the norm will always constitute a problem. Consideration of the ways in which the heteronormative, gendered ‘bargain’ of the public–private divide produces sometimes unlivable inequalities, or of the ways in which economic structures make this idealized independence unachievable for some, is foreclosed in this account.

The focus, then, is on a crisis produced by a welfare system that disincentivizes marriage, and this is developed further in the CSJ’s 2009 document *Dynamic Benefits*. Here, gender is mobilized in two ways to develop the story of the perverse incentives produced by welfare policy over the years of Labour government and to articulate the urgent need for reform. First, and most directly, there is the insistence that the benefits system itself penalizes the positive behaviours of getting and staying married, of reproducing responsibly in the context of marriage and financial independence, and of home ownership—instead, encouraging people to deviate from these norms. In putting this case, the narrative address mobilizes two affective registers. The first is a kind of exasperated appeal to the failure of common sense, best illustrated by a quotation from David Cameron’s speech to the 2008 Conservative Party conference:

I spent some time recently sitting with a benefit officer in a Jobcentre Plus. In came a young couple. She was pregnant. He was the dad. They were out of work and trying to get somewhere to live. The benefit officer didn’t really have much choice but to explain that they would be better off if she lived on her own. What on earth are we doing with a system like that? (Centre for Social Justice 2009: 104)

These are the kinds of anecdotes that fuel tabloid frenzy about shameless mothers and feckless fathers mentioned earlier—the difference perhaps is that, here, the suggestion is that potentially ‘decent’ people are being led astray by the benefits system itself. This is a recurrent Tory rhetorical move, one that takes an isolated anecdote, oversimplifies it and, at times, distorts what it represents about the system in question, and then asks the exasperated question: we saw this in Chap. 2 with the framing of the Red Tape Challenge on equalities. This address to common sense appeals to the power of the simple problem and solution. It invites its intended audience to agree that we all know what is right in these cases but that something is getting in the way of us doing the right thing.

The second is an apparently more measured reflection on the perhaps unintended consequences of Labour’s policies on child poverty, as epitomized in these two extracts:

There has been a major increase in the number of parents receiving child-related means-tested benefits. Child-related benefits have become increasingly generous over time. Policy since the mid-1970s has developed in response to evidence that lone parents are particularly exposed to the risk of poverty. This has had a welcome effect on the financial position of many vulnerable individuals. However, *it has reached a level now where the system has inculcated within it a large penalty against couples – especially couple parents*. The additional out-of-work benefits for those with children are often sufficient to lift a childless household out of poverty. This has two effects. First, it has provided welcome relief for many vulnerable children at the margin. Secondly, it *has made life as a lone parent a more sustainable option*. The issues of the couple penalty and the so-called ‘parent premium’ have rightly been the subject of much debate. The question is: *might the current benefit structure have an effect on the decision of whether or not to have a child vs. working as a route out of poverty?* (Centre for Social Justice 2009: 80, emphasis added)

The benefits system is a vital weapon in the fight against poverty in all its forms, and especially child poverty. Yet there are also social consequences to every measure within the benefits system, and at times it seems that this has been ignored. Having heard the opinions of many voluntary groups in this area, the Working Group *believes that it is time* for these effects to be

discussed openly, and *for these discrete social breakages to be repaired through reform*. (Centre for Social Justice 2009: 104, emphasis added)

Here, the story goes, perhaps previous governments tried to do the right thing, by addressing child poverty, but they ended up making it worse, because they made it more sustainable for parents not to do the right thing of getting and staying married, maybe even choosing, irresponsibly, to have children instead of working their way out of poverty. Again, the language of ‘rightness’ pervades these two accounts. People are being penalized for doing what we all know is the right thing, being and staying in couples. Doing the wrong thing has broken society as it should be, and this needs to be made right. And it is time, it is only right that we speak of these things openly—this failure of common sense has been covered up for too long. We can now give ourselves permission to disavow those making life choices that we all know are problematic but which a perverse benefits system has allowed to continue.

The power of normative gender is also mobilized in a less direct way throughout the story of welfare reform, and this is through the language of the cross-generational reproduction of worklessness. This brings us back to the concern about the private reproductive sphere needing to fall into line with a retraction of the public welfare state—here, focused on the anxiety that inappropriate patterns of reproductive labour are not training up the next generation as neo-liberal self-actualizing citizens but, rather, are breeding dependency. This language is seen in the endlessly repeated trope of the family where three generations of people have not worked, despite no one being able to identify or quantify the existence of such families (see Shildrick et al. 2012)—a trope, interestingly, that Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair was also using in 1997 (Macdonald et al. 2013). It is regularly repeated in the CSJ documents, where the spectre of whole neighbourhoods being blighted by the transmission of worklessness across generations and from house to house, like a disease, is presented:

This situation has had dire consequences for society [...] worklessness in the UK is often concentrated geographically. In the east end of Glasgow, for example, over 60% of children live in workless households and almost

half the residents claim Incapacity Benefit (IB). In workless hotspots the culture of not working is often transmitted, not just from generation to generation, but reinforced from household to household. (Centre for Social Justice 2009: 48)

We see it repeated across the DWP documents as well, as in this foreword by Iain Duncan Smith to the *Universal Credit* White Paper:

[...] welfare dependency took root in communities up and down the country, breeding hopelessness and intergenerational poverty. (Department for Work and Pensions 2010b: 1)

and followed up in the Executive Summary:

This has consequences for us all, not just those trapped on benefits who no longer see work as the best route out of poverty. The social and economic costs of the current system's failures are borne by society as a whole, since worklessness blights the life chances of parents and children and diminishes the country's productive potential. The UK has one of the highest rates of children growing up in homes where no one works and this pattern repeats itself through the generations. Less than 60 per cent of lone parents in the UK are in employment, compared to 70 per cent or more in France, Germany and the Netherlands.

Universal Credit will start to change this. It will *reintroduce the culture of work in households where it may have been absent for generations*. (Department for Work and Pensions 2010b: 3, emphasis added)

Here, the lone parent who is an unfortunate victim of circumstance recedes and the irresponsible parent who fails to reproduce properly inside the normatively gendered framework of marriage, and in so doing reproduces a culture of worklessness across the generations, takes centre stage. We will see this figure of the inappropriately reproducing woman revisited in even more vociferous terms in the narrative framing of the 'Social Justice' strategy and the Troubled Families programme in Chap. 5. In a move that we will see repeated across a number of other policy areas in the chapters to follow, what emerges here is a sense of crisis produced by the excess of the reproductive, which sits uneasily within the 'rationality

of rationing' (Bhattacharyya 2015: 100) that imbues the welfare state under austerity. The welfare reform narrative examined here relies on a preoccupation with scrutinizing and disciplining the manner in which reproduction takes place, and those who carry out their reproductive activities in ways that would seem to place too great a burden on the state, or who make what are deemed to be inappropriate claims of entitlement to belonging and mutual support, become the object of intensified intervention and control. Here, we begin to see what I am arguing is a recurring theme of austerity narratives—that the reproductive is seen as a troublesome incursion into the political that must be taken in hand, disciplined in such a way as not to make too many demands on the political, and managed in line with normative understandings of gender.

The story of who is entitled to the diminished and always precarious share of support on offer in this version of '21st century welfare' is therefore multiply marked by gender. It is there most obviously in this targeting of the non-normative family and the championing of traditional marriage as the bedrock of society. But it is also there in the way those highly gendered qualities of independence vs. interdependence, productive labour vs. reproductive care, are mobilized in the framing of the crisis and its resolution. In its compulsion to construct the well-functioning citizen as one who engages in paid work so as to be independent of the state, and who privatizes the demands of unpaid reproductive care within the normative framework of the family, this narrative necessarily sees any failure to honour this public–private arrangement as a crisis. In this very partial account of human activity, any trace of interdependence beyond the normative family constitutes a failure to abide by the neo-liberal social contract in which you can only 'get out' what you have measurably 'put in'. This is reinforced by the common sense we are invited to identify with in the politics of address in this narrative. 'Doing the right thing' means increasingly forsaking one's sense of entitlement to social support, refusing that sense of the possibility of mutual interdependence and, instead, embracing neo-liberal austerity's appeal to 'atomicity, non-collectivity, and, if not quite self-reliance its close and damaging cousin, self-blame' (Bhattacharyya 2015: 99). Inappropriate reproduction and interdependence become justified grounds for the stigmatizing language



of the scrounger. These dynamics are also crucial to the way the narrative of welfare reform positions disability, which is explored in more detail in Chap. 4.

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# 4

## Work Yourself Better: The Disabled Person as Benefit Scrounger

The years of the Coalition government (2010–2015) saw a remarkable rise in political and media focus on disabled people and their relationship to the welfare state, and the intensification of a discourse about the disabled person as benefit scrounger. The crafting of this narrative strand needs unpacking because it does a number of things simultaneously. It displaces the more traditional and still popularly prominent discourses of disability as individual tragedy and of the need for charity for the unfortunate and vulnerable disabled person. It also appropriates elements of the social model of disability, especially the disability rights movement's mobilizing of a language of independent living and autonomy, while using them for very different purposes. This selective appropriation of critical disability theory and activism's focus on independent living is put to use in order to consolidate and intensify the production of the disabled person as subject of governmentality; that is, as a subject that needs to be taken in hand, managed and produced through the surveillance and disciplining of the state. At the same time, in its articulation of both crisis and resolution, the narrative retracts and almost eliminates any space in which to consider the complexities of a debilitated body, consolidating

the neo-liberal move to see all disabled people as ‘work-able’ (Soldatic and Meekosha 2014) and to accord them subject status primarily through their relationship to paid work. I explore the discursive construction of all these elements in this chapter.

As we saw in Chap. 3, the introduction of welfare reform policy documents was accompanied by an upsurge in (mainly) tabloid media representations of the benefit claimant as scrounger. This has also been the case in relation to claimants of disability benefits. In their analysis of four tabloid newspapers and *The Guardian*, Briant et al. (2013) note that, in the period October 2010–January 2011, there was a marked rise in the use of the terms ‘scrounger’, ‘handout’, ‘workshy’ and ‘cheats’ in references to disabled people; an increase in references to living on Incapacity Benefit as a lifestyle choice; increased coverage of fraud, as well as repeated distinctions between the ‘genuinely ill, deserving claimants’ and others (Briant et al. 2013: 881–882; see also Garthwaite 2011).

But, as with welfare reform more generally, there has also been no shortage of media coverage of the disastrous effects of welfare reform on disabled people, and of the shambolic ways in which the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) process, through which entitlement to state support is determined, has been administered by ATOS, a private IT services corporation, since 2010. Both the Commons public accounts committee (Syal 2014) and the Work and Pensions Select Committee (Wintour 2014) challenged ATOS’ competence and the Work Capability Assessment’s fairness. A July 2013 Commons debate on a Labour motion to carry out an assessment of the cumulative impact of all the welfare reforms on disabled people recounted many of the stories which have also been covered in media such as *The Guardian* and *The Independent* of incidents such as the terminally ill being judged fit for work, or the implications on disabled people of the ‘bedroom tax’—a reform which limits the amount of housing benefit paid to those deemed to be living in accommodation with a spare room (Hansard 2013). By 2015, ATOS had bought itself out of the Department for Work and Pensions contract and had been replaced by another private provider, Maximus, with ATOS citing abuse of its staff as one of the reasons for its withdrawal, while its senior vice-president also admitted to a Commons select committee hearing that ‘shareholders and stakeholders’ would not support a ‘a contract

that would give rise to both the reputational and profitability issues we are facing now' (Gentleman 2015).

And, yet again, as for welfare reform more generally, support for the government's programme remained high through the years of the Coalition. One way of understanding this is that the prevalence of representations of the disabled person as benefit scrounger creates a discursive ground for tolerating the negative effects of benefit reform. As Polly Toynbee has argued:

Duncan Smith has overseen an unscrupulous smear campaign using these bogus 'spiralling out of control' figures together with well-placed anecdotes of cheats caught running marathons. (His own figures show a fraud rate of just 0.7%.) This is his one success: public sympathy has turned sour, so now the genuinely disabled report frequent and growing abuse. (Toynbee 2013)

But this tells only one part of the story of how consent has been crafted for the project of reducing expenditure on state support for disabled people. As with welfare reform more generally, there is also a 'positive' narrative here that, in this case, draws on a neo-liberal appropriation of the disability movement's language of autonomy, independent living and integration into the mainstream. This casting of the disabled person as 'work-able' (Soldatic and Meekosha 2014; Morris 2011) also needs to be attended to, as do the ultimately able-ist underpinnings of the neo-liberal subject that this narrative reproduces.

## Labour Amenabilities

This discursive work to appropriate a more positive language on disability to the neo-liberal project of shrinking the welfare state began under New Labour (1997–2010). As Grover and Piggott (2010, 2013) have demonstrated in their reading of New Labour's Work Programme and the replacement of Incapacity Benefit (IB) with the new Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), many of the key elements to be found in the Coalition narrative on disability benefit reform were already put in place

by the previous government. This includes a heightened emphasis on the economic and social *obligations* of disabled people to work, regardless of the kind of work that is available (Grover and Piggott 2013: 10), the restricting of eligibility to benefits in order to enforce that obligation and to discourage a perceived too-great dependency on the state (Grover and Piggott 2010: 265) and a framing of tighter conditionality in a language of ‘support’ to enter the labour market as the solution to poverty and other disadvantages (ibid.: 266). Grover and Piggott argue that a process of ‘social sorting’ is at work here, creating a hierarchy of benefit claimants with an emphasis on the ‘most needy’ and the ‘most deserving’ (ibid.: 268), and stressing the need for individuals to express their social responsibilities through paid work, rather than languishing in a something for nothing or dependency culture (ibid.: 271). This twinned move, of demarcating the most needy (or most vulnerable) and the most deserving (those willing to engage with the requests made of them by the state) from the too-dependent, and of framing the evaluation of disability benefit claimants primarily in terms of their relationship to paid work, is one that we will see repeated and intensified in Coalition discourse. We should also remember that the now notorious shift of the Work Capability Assessment process away from family doctors to private contractor ATOS, was begun under New Labour (ibid.: 268). Despite the simultaneous mainstreaming of elements of a social model language in government disability policy, the shift from doctor-led assessment to ATOS-administered assessment was, in part, aimed at addressing concerns that doctors would issue medical certificates based not only on functional limitations, but also taking into account wider economic and social factors. For Grover and Piggott, this was ‘clearly a statement that income maintenance policy [...] should be framed by medical considerations only, rather than broader socio-economic considerations’ (ibid.: 271). The disability narrative sketched out under New Labour thus maintained an internal tension between medical and social models, drawing on each when most useful for positioning disabled people primarily through their relationship to the labour market. As Houston and Lindsay (2010: 133) argued, ‘activation’—reconnecting benefit claimants with the labour market through encouraging and compelling claimants to be active in seeking

employment—emerged during this period as one of the dominant areas of reform of EU welfare states, and was increasingly being applied to those in receipt of disability benefit. As an example of this emerging focus, they cite Labour's Green Paper *No-one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility*, which argues for substantial increases in compulsion faced by Incapacity Benefit claimants arguing that 'the individual's right to support comes in exchange for taking clear steps to improve their own circumstances' (Department for Work and Pensions 2008: 26). New Labour policy thus set an amenable discursive ground for what was to come under the Coalition.

## Preparing the Ground: Centre for Social Justice Documents

As with welfare reform more generally, we can see the evolution of the Coalition narrative of the disabled person as benefit scrounger beginning to emerge before the 2010 election, in the work of the think-tank set up by Coalition Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith, the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ). Its 2007 report *Breakthrough Britain*, also discussed in Chap. 3, is again my focus here. In its story of the growth of welfare dependency under Labour, the document includes the following account regarding people with disabilities:

### People with Disabilities

Long-term sickness or disability is the reason given by 39 per cent of working age people living in workless households for their inactivity. Britain now has the highest proportion of long term working-age people with disabilities of any Western country – 7.4 per cent of the working population.

Of the total number on Incapacity Benefit (IB), 85 per cent have been on the benefit for over a year, and the average duration of a claim is between eight and ten years. Currently, IB claimants are getting younger.

The numbers for those claiming Disability Living Allowance have also grown at an alarming rate: claimants up 50 per cent since 1997, and total cost doubling.

There are enormous ranges in incidence from 1.9 per cent in Windsor to 10% per cent in Northern Ireland, and 12.8 per cent in Merthyr Tydfil. Some have suggested that DLA is being used selectively as a substitute for unemployment benefit, rather than simply reflecting underlying differences in health patterns.

The Government has also failed to address the changing nature of claimant illness. In 1997, 25 per cent of IB claimants were suffering from ‘mental and behavioural’ problems: by 2004 this had increased to 38 per cent. Indeed, over the past decade there has been an 82 per cent increase in the number of people claiming IB for ‘depressive episodes’ and a 129 per cent increase in claimants suffering from eating disorders. It is likely many of these people, with appropriate support, could be in work. (Centre for Social Justice 2007: 18–19)

This passage is accompanied by a highlighted quote from John Hutton, Labour Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, claiming on 24 January 2007 that ‘After two years on incapacity benefits, a person is more likely to die or retire than to find a new job’ (ibid.).

Here, the increase in numbers of disability benefit claimants is read as straightforward evidence of illegitimacy. The growth is ‘alarming’, the rate is the highest in the Western world, claimants are ‘getting younger’—together, these remarks suggest that somehow the natural order of things is being unsettled. Regional variations are taken as evidence that the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is being used as a substitute for unemployment benefit, even though DLA claimants may also be in work and claiming the additional support they are entitled to in order to compensate for the increased costs and support needs that are related to their impairments. The slippage in the passage between Incapacity Benefit (an out-of-work benefit) and DLA (an allowance that recognizes the additional costs incurred by disabled people regardless of their work status) blurs these distinctions and creates the impression that all benefit claimants are entirely dependent on the state. The growth in claimants with mental health issues is taken as particularly suspicious, with the assertion that many of these, with support, could (or should?) be in work. Hutton’s statement is taken as a warning that disability benefits are an active disincentive to work, or that they effectively incapacitate the claimant from finding work. Nowhere is there room for an alternative account—that



the growth in all kinds of disability benefit might be, at least in part, a product of the successes of the disability rights movement in pressing its claims for recognition and response to the complexities of disability, and of the social model's influence in turning attention to responsibilities of the state and society to remove disabling barriers.

Instead, the focus is all about the positive effects of work on health and well-being, which is presented in very absolutist terms—work is always better than being out of work or on benefits—for all social groups, including the disabled (2007: 20). Of course, this is often true; but work itself can also be a source of stress and ill-health, depending on the conditions under which one works (see Morris 2011), and this is a very one-sided account when it makes no mention of these other possibilities, as well as of the failings of the labour market to provide decent and suitable jobs (see Patrick 2012). Instead, we are given the story of 'Shettleston Man'—a case study that suggests that 'terminal unemployment' is itself the cause of disability and that work is the cure:

#### **'Shettleston Man', Glasgow**

Shettleston man is the collective name given for a group of individuals from the Glasgow suburb Shettleston. Shettleston man has a life expectancy of 63 – 14 years below the UK average – lives in social housing and is terminally unemployed. His low white blood cell count is killing him, and this is a result of the stress he lives under: namely that he has no control over his life. Research showed that his life expectancy remained unaltered by changes in diet and exercise. However, the same research showed that the impact of the stress on his white blood cells could be reversed in 3 years by giving him work and enabling him to contribute to society. (Centre for Social Justice 2007: 21)

Rhetorically, this highlighted case study does a number of things. First to note is the anthropological, almost archaeological, tone of the account as describing some exotic, near-defunct species—Shettleston Man is a species out of time and place, a throwback who fails to embrace the neo-liberal imperative to take control of his life. His worklessness is 'terminal'—it is what is killing him. The crisis is of his own making, since there is no reference to any structural constraints on his access to employment, or to greater control over the conditions of his life more generally. Give

him a job and his disability will go away. Since this is the only specific example of a disabled person given in the document, he stands for all disabled people, inviting the reader to believe that this might well be the case for much of the problem of disability. The CSJ document thus reflects the sense expressed in New Labour's 2008 White Paper *Raising Expectations and increasing support: reforming welfare for the future* that 'the moment is right for an expectation that the majority of people who are sick and/or who have impairments will only be so for short periods of time and that, even with long-term health impairments, they will be able to take at least some paid work'. (Department for Work and Pensions 2008 cited in Grover and Piggott 2010: 271). The 'moment' that is right in this account is the neo-liberal moment, in which, as Mitchell and Snyder have argued, we see the ascendance of a construct of disability as an 'integrate-able difference—a normalised disabled body that can enter the social sphere of active citizenship promoted by democratic social orders' (Mitchell and Snyder 2014: 43). If disability can be folded into the neo-liberal logic of individual self-actualization through work and consumption, then those still relying on welfare payments can be repudiated as anachronistic, individual failures. For Soldatic and Meekosha, the 'principal aim of this moral repudiation is to create public consent for the re-stratification of "disability", enabling active state withdrawal of disability social provisioning measures for a new class of disability that is "more work-able" or the "able of the disabled"' (2014: 202).

## Coalition Welfare Reform and Disability

Neither the *21st Century Welfare* Green Paper nor the *Universal Credit* White Paper examined in Chap. 3 have much that is specific to say about disability, other than folding the reform of DLA into the same overriding principles of welfare reform discussed in Chap. 3. We see this in the *21st Century Welfare* document's listing of the principles underpinning its delineation of 'a fair system that protects those in greatest need':

- establish a fairer relationship between the people who receive benefits and the people who pay for them and, as crucially, between the people on out-of-work benefits and the people who work in low-paid jobs;

- target support more efficiently, supporting and protecting those in vulnerable circumstances;
- help to divert people away from the pathways that lead to poverty and give people living in poverty a route out; and
- support our wider goal of strengthening families, supporting carers and enabling disabled people to have an equal role in society. (Department for Work and Pensions 2010a: 6)

Here, we can note that disabled people are characterized as both ‘vulnerable’ and, in Mitchell and Snyder’s term, ‘integrate-able’, restating that process of social sorting between the deserving needy and the able-disabled who need to sort themselves out. Other than this general statement of principles, though, there is little in the consultation paper that focuses specifically on disability benefits. This, in itself, is problematic—if DLA (and its replacement, the Personal Independence Payment—PIP) and ESA are just folded into the general discussion of Universal Credit, which is primarily about greater conditionality tied to work, then this helps create the discursive space for treating disability claimants like everyone else; that is, as always-potential scroungers, for whom dependency is always being coded as a negative thing. Even with the division between those on ESA in the work-related category, which has conditionality, and those in the ESA support category, which doesn’t, the ground has to some extent been cleared for prioritizing the similarities between disability and other out-of-work benefits, rather than attending to the specificities of social support for disabled people. Thus, disabled people, like the unemployed or the working poor, are primarily defined by their relation to paid work, and are to be judged by the same neo-liberal standard of ‘work-ability’.

We can see this delineation of the problem of disability benefit further elaborated in the *Universal Credit* White Paper:

### **Disability**

21. The Government is absolutely committed to supporting disabled people to participate fully in society, including remaining in or returning to work wherever feasible. The model introduced in 2008 for the Employment and Support Allowance has worked well. This provides additional benefit components for people in the Work Related Activity and Support Groups. We intend to mirror this approach in Universal Credit.

22. The Government believes the existing structure of overlapping disability premiums is overly complex and causes confusion. We are considering what extra support may be needed for disabled people in Universal Credit, over and above the additional components mentioned above and the benefits available elsewhere in the system. (Department for Work and Pensions 2010b: 18)

And then further:

### **Disability Living Allowance**

17. As noted above, the Government has already announced in the Budget that it will fundamentally reform Disability Living Allowance from 2013 to 2014.
18. We intend to retain its role, outside the Universal Credit, as a non-means-tested cash benefit. It will continue to be paid to people in and out of work.
19. However, *spending on Disability Living Allowance has been growing at an unsustainable rate, so we do need to ensure that future support is targeted on people who face significant barriers to participating in society.* At the heart of the benefit will be an objective assessment, which we are developing with the help of medical experts and disabled people. This will allow us to assess more accurately and consistently who would benefit most from additional support. (Department for Work and Pensions 2010b: 48, emphasis added)

So, the problem of disability benefits is framed as, first, being too complex, but also, second, as too expensive. As Toynbee (2013) argues above, the relentlessly repeated claim by both Chancellor George Osborne and DWP Secretary Iain Duncan Smith, that at least 20% needed to be cut from the disability benefits budget, was never based on any evidence of fraud or over-claiming. In the July 2013 Commons debate on the impact of welfare cuts on disabled people, Conservative MP Kwasi Kwarteng reiterates this kind of unsubstantiated assertion, when he says:

When the disability living allowance was introduced in 1992, the number of recipients was one third of what it is today; the number of people has

tripled in 20 years. That does not reflect the changing work environment in Great Britain. (Hansard 2013: Column 423)

No evidence is presented to show how this changing work environment should discount the need for DLA; the claim is simply repeated in order to drive home the idea that the numbers are too high. But how much is too much disability? Instead of framing this as a problem of how much the state is willing to spend, the problem is turned around to imply that some are claiming who should not be.

More specific fleshing out of the thinking underpinning disability benefit reform can be found in documents related to reform of DLA and the introduction of PIP. The consultation on reform of the DLA began in December 2010, and received 5500 responses, 5000 from individuals, and 500 from groups. The government response was published in April 2011, with a foreword by the then Disabilities Minister Maria Miller. Here, Miller reiterates the claim about DLA's complexity, but also more explicitly appropriates the social model language of independent living and not being labelled by one's impairments, while tethering it to a depoliticized language of individualization:

As it stands, DLA is complex to apply for and to administer, lacks consistency in the way it supports disabled people with similar needs, and has no systematic process for checking the ongoing accuracy of awards.

Now is the time to reform DLA and replace it with a new benefit for working-age disabled people. A benefit that better *reflects the desire from disabled people to live independent lives, not to be labelled by a condition, but to be judged for what an individual can do not what they can't*. (Department for Work and Pensions 2011: 1, emphasis added)

As Soldatic and Meekosha have argued, the neo-liberal state actively co-opts the disability movement's collective demands for the right to work through harnessing individual 'employability' (2014: 197). With its relentless focus on the individual, and on what the individual can do, this should be seen as a deliberate 'decollectivisation strategy that at the same time appeals to the movement's agenda for inclusion in the labour market' (ibid.: 198). In a 'precarious convergence' with the neo-liberal state,

the disability movement's struggles for self-directed support via personalized funding structures which disabled people can control are co-opted in perverse ways. The movement's political critique of a disabling society and of the structural processes of exclusion and inequality that underpin its collective demands are stripped away, leaving a focus only on the disabled individual and their capacities (ibid.: 203; see also Morris 2011). This is very similar to the ways in which the appeal to the individual worked in relation to the equality strategy explored in Chap. 2, and with similar, simultaneously 'flattening' and depoliticizing effects. Naturally, we all want to be recognized as individuals, unique and agentic, and, of course, we do not wish to be reduced to or defined by labels. But, at the same time, the appeal to the individual here operates to leave that individual isolated and exposed, by discounting attention both to the external, structural factors that disable, and to the collective claims for both recognition and redistribution that the disability rights movement represents. Importantly, the disabled people's movement's attempts to redefine independence—challenging the able-ist norm of 'doing everything for yourself' and replacing it with an emphasis on greater choice and control over the relationships and institutions through which care and support are provided—is jettisoned and independence returned to a neo-liberal marker of independence from the state (Morris 2011). This exposure becomes clearer when, in the name of personalization and the refusal of labelling, the new PIP benefit is tied to fixed term awards and an ongoing process of state surveillance.

*Personal Independence Payment will be a more dynamic benefit that acknowledges that people's conditions change over time and that our understanding of how disability affects people changes too, so rather than having 70 per cent of people on indefinite awards, as is currently the case with DLA, we will introduce a new fairer, more transparent and objective assessment, and, in most cases, introduce fixed term awards. In doing so, we need to take account of the full range of disabilities and treat people as individuals, not labelling them by impairment type, creating a truly personalised benefit that evolves over time.* (Department for Work and Pensions 2011: 1, emphasis added)

This linking of personalization and treating people as individuals rather than as defined by their impairment is reiterated throughout the

document and is always tied to the question of time limits on entitlements to PIP. We see it in the Executive Summary:

There was no consensus in the responses we received on whether people with certain impairments or health conditions should have an automatic entitlement to Personal Independence Payment. *Many do not think it is right that we should judge people purely on the type of health condition or impairment they may have, and are committed to a more individualised approach to assessing an individual's claim, and we agree.* (Department for Work and Pensions 2011: 4, emphasis added)

And, again, when the question of automatic entitlement for long-term conditions is discussed in more detail:

We acknowledge that there is a difference of opinion on this issue. However, *we do not think it right that we should judge people purely on the type of health condition or impairment they have, labelling individuals in this way, and making blanket decisions about benefit entitlement.* We recognise that people lead varied and often complex lives, with differing circumstances and needs – *they do not fit neatly into boxes.* We believe that Personal Independence Payment should reflect this, providing support tailored to these personal circumstances. We are designing an assessment that will treat people as individuals and consider the impact of health condition or impairments on their everyday lives. The assessment will take account of the fact that many people have complex support needs and more than one health condition or impairment. (Department for Work and Pensions 2011: 19, emphasis added)

As was the case for the equality strategy, collective claims for addressing inequality are reduced to 'box-ticking', which has the perverse effect of denying people the agency of their individuality. Any recognition of collective difference, and the ways in which it has been constituted as a ground of inequality, is foreclosed. What needs to be kept in mind is that this mobilizing of individual complexity, and a language of respect for individual needs, is being discursively framed by the over-riding imperative to impose time limits on entitlements to benefits. This is the power of narrative at work—the same demands take on different meanings when they are framed as being part of a particular crisis and are being pulled towards a particular resolution.

If we read the document as a narrative, we can see how this insistence on imposing time limits is also part of a larger story about disability and the disabled benefit claimant as someone who ultimately needs to be taken in hand by a watchful state. The disabled benefit claimant is, on the one hand, portrayed as the person who best knows their own condition:

We believe that disabled people are best placed to tell us themselves how their health condition or impairment affects them, and recognise the importance of this for many disabled people. Individuals will still be able to provide information about their health condition and its impact on their daily lives. We will work with disabled people and their organisations as we design Personal Independence Payment to ensure this information is captured effectively. (Department for Work and Pensions 2011: 17)

But, on the other hand, disability is described as so complex that individual claimants may not know when they are getting better, as in this extract:

More than 70 per cent of the current DLA caseload have an indefinite award. Although we are able to reassess the level of award of any customer at any time, we do not currently have any systematic way of ensuring that awards remain correct. *Individuals' conditions and needs may increase or decrease over time – sometimes so gradually that the individual themselves may not notice.* Even where impairments and conditions themselves do not change, the impact of them might – as people manage their condition more effectively, for example.

[...]The 2004/05 *DLA National Benefit Review identified cases where the change in customers' needs had been so gradual that it would be unreasonable to expect them to know at which point their entitlement to DLA might have changed. These cases do not result in a recoverable overpayment as we cannot identify when the change occurred. It found that £630 million (or 11.2 per cent of cases) was overpaid because of these changes in customer circumstances. It also found that £190 million (or 6.3 per cent of cases) was underpaid to individuals for the same reason.*

[...] *It cannot be right that individuals receive incorrect awards for long periods. Under Personal Independence Payment, other than in exceptional circumstances, awards will be for a fixed period, allowing us to ensure awards remain correct. We will take a personalised approach to setting the*



length of awards, varying the frequency and format of awards and reviews depending on the individual's needs and the likelihood of their health condition or impairment changing. (Department for Work and Pensions 2011: 31–32, emphasis added)

So, disabled claimants must be treated as individuals with complex needs but, at the same time, cannot be trusted to evaluate their conditions themselves. The state must exercise its power of continuous surveillance, to ensure that those who are getting better—sometimes without their own knowledge—are not still benefitting from incorrect awards. As in welfare reform more generally, the language of ‘doing the right thing’ is repeatedly evoked here, a discursive framing that ties fairness, justice and an appeal to common sense to the intensification of state scrutiny and limits on entitlement. A similar double move is at work in the consultation about how the successful take-up of adaptive aids might impact on people's entitlement to benefits. In response to the question ‘Should the assessment of a disabled person's ability take into account any aids and adaptations they use?’, the document notes that responses register concern that those who have successfully accessed adaptive aids will now be disadvantaged because they will be seen as having fewer needs (Department for Work and Pensions 2011: 25), which might perversely encourage people to be more dependent in order to qualify. In response to this concern, the document states that:

Disabled people receive a diverse range of support from Government, including aids and adaptations which can make a real difference to people's lives. For example, Local Authorities spent over £230 million on aids in 2009–10. Through Personal Independence Payment, we *wish to target support to those disabled people who are least able to participate and to live independently. We therefore believe it is right and fair for the assessment to take some account of the successful use of aids and adaptations where they help individuals carry out activities. We will do so in a way that is proportionate and appropriate.* (Department for Work and Pensions 2011: 26, emphasis added)

On the other hand, there is a suggestion of some compulsion or conditionality if services and activities deemed beneficial are not taken up:

We want Personal Independence Payment to be a more active and enabling benefit, so we are keen to develop ways to help encourage individuals to make use of services and support. We will consider further how this could work in practice. We do not intend to make Personal Independence Payment *conditional on taking up certain activities or support, although we will keep this under review. For example, we might reconsider this if it became clear that a proportion of people were failing to access available aids, adaptations or services that would significantly help them.* (Department for Work and Pensions 2011: 35, emphasis added)

Once again, there is a categorization at work here that sorts the ‘integrateable’ able-disabled—who, by successfully using adaptive aids, are seen as less entitled to their rights to social support—from the perversely dependent who refuse to be as free of state support as they should be. The assumption underpinning this categorization—of both those who no longer need state support and those who could free themselves from support but don’t—is that many, if not all, disabled people should ‘get better’, or at least take themselves in hand and reduce dependence on the state. The state’s role is to monitor that people are doing everything they can to reach this independent status.

## ***Fulfilling Potential* and the Refusal of Disabled Embodiment**

One might say that in focusing on welfare reform documents, this chapter has skewed the overall approach of the Coalition government to disability, and that defining disabled people in relation to work is inevitable in this particular policy context. But the attention to workability, and to appropriating elements of the social model emphasis on autonomy and independent living and situating them within an overall neo-liberal framework, also pervades the government’s disability policy more generally. It is, I think, telling that responsibility for disability issues was sited in the Department for Work and Pensions under the Coalition government, rather than, say, in the Government Equalities Office. Perhaps this

is why, while promising attention to other aspects of disabled people's lives in the future, the more general Disability Strategy documents produced in 2012 and 2013 reproduce the same emphases and framing as the welfare reform documents. The attachment to work, together with evoking the inspirational figures of the 2012 Paralympic 'superhumans', remain the framing devices of all these documents. The various documents produced under the title *Fulfilling Potential* all focus on the relationship to work and all tie this relationship to welfare reform. In her minister's foreword to the 2012 document *Fulfilling Potential: Next Steps*, Esther McVey makes this link explicit: 'welfare reform is critically important – to support disabled people's rights to work and independent living, to better reflect their desire not to be labelled by a condition, and to be judged on what they can do, not what they can't' (Department for Work and Pensions 2012). There is the suggestion that benefit reform is essential, not only because of economic necessity, but also because this reflects the public will:

It is all the more important that the Government is clear about its principles at a time when hard economic decisions have to be made. And it is vital that assistance – whether in the form of benefits, services or legislation – *commands widespread support* because it is well targeted and effective. Society has to include disabled people on an equal basis. With very constrained public expenditure we will need to find new and innovative ways of bringing this about. (Department for Work and Pensions 2012: 18, emphasis added)

As in the welfare reform documents discussed above, changes to disability benefits are promoted as a way of enacting independence, choice and control, and better health and economic outcomes:

Reforming welfare to support disabled people to gain and maintain independence and reduce the risk of dependency. For many this will include support to work, which is the best route out of poverty, and very often beneficial for those with long-term health conditions. But we will also provide unequivocal support for those who cannot work. (Department for Work and Pensions 2012: 35)

Again, in the February 2013 document *Fulfilling Potential: Building a deeper understanding of disability in the UK today* (Department for Work and Pensions 2013a), the focus is on work:

In developing this paper we have focused more on some areas than others, for example, employment. We chose to focus on employment because, for those of working age, whether or not a person is in work has a major impact on poverty and social exclusion. However, we do recognise that other areas of life are also key. In our future work we will focus more on other areas. (Department for Work and Pensions 2013a: 6)

Finally, in July 2013, the document *Fulfilling Potential – Making it Happen* (Department for Work and Pensions 2013b) lays out the promised more general government approach to disability. Here, in her ministerial foreword, McVey would appear to be broadening the focus to include the whole of public services:

I want all disabled people, whatever their age or background, to have the opportunity to fulfil their potential – to lead full and active lives that are valued by society. We cannot achieve this unless we have modern and responsive public services to support all disabled people, their carers and families. (Department for Work and Pensions 2013b)

Still, the focus turns immediately to reference a crisis inherited from the last Labour government:

We need to overhaul the outdated systems we inherited to ensure that the UK stays at the forefront of equality and independent living and acts as a role model to support the aim of fulfilling potential (Department for Work and Pensions 2013b),

and to the need to cut costs in a ‘difficult and challenging economic situation’ (ibid.). Again echoing the equality strategy, there is an evocation of:

[...] a new way of doing things, a way that aims to involve, inspire and support all citizens to share in the shape of our future.

It is not for Government alone to bring about change – we all have a role, especially disabled people’s user-led organisations. Dynamic and creative partnerships across sectors are essential for innovation, and can bring about the changes needed in communities that will have a real and lasting effect on the day-to-day lives of disabled people. (Department for Work and Pensions 2013b)

Here, we see a clear appropriation of the language of the disabled people’s movement, reinforced in the first section of the document laying out the headlines of the government’s approach, where the language of independence, choice and control, co-production and partnership is evoked:

Equality is at the very heart of the Coalition Government. It is fundamental to building a *strong economy and a fair society* where everyone has opportunities to realise their aspirations and fulfil their potential.

Major reforms to public services and welfare are underway. [...] These aim to:

- support disabled people to live independent lives;
- personalise services;
- give more choice and control; and
- improve opportunities to work and play a full part in society. (Department for Work and Pensions 2013b: 3, emphasis in the original)

But this statement of principles is very quickly tethered once again to welfare reform and the cutting of expenditure:

Our welfare system is one of the most supportive in the world. However, we also need to recognise its faults. Compared to other countries, our system is overly complicated – our customers tell us as much. They find it difficult to understand what they are entitled to. We also need to ensure support is affordable – we spend 2.4 per cent of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on disability benefits, a fifth more than the European average, and significantly more than Germany, France, Italy and Spain, our major European competitors – and our spending grew by a third between 2005 and 2009. (Department for Work and Pensions 2013b: 3)

The rest of the document does move on to consider key areas such as education, inclusive communities, accessible public transport, housing, disability hate crime, and partnerships and co-production with disabled people's user-led organizations. The language of the disabled people's movement is in full evidence, as are a range of case studies of positive role models and examples of successful projects supported by local and national government. These sections display a kind of relentless chirpiness, with an 'Inspired by 2012' tagline and a series of 'able-disabled' role models who talk about the joy of being able 'to just work around a problem, solve it and then be able to do it yourself' (Department for Work and Pensions 2013b: 8), or encourage young disabled people to 'follow your dreams. Do what you really enjoy doing. I think that's what life is all about. If the end result is harder than you think it's going to be, it's even more rewarding when you get there' (ibid.). At the same time, the document does show an awareness of some of the complexities of addressing the effects of a disabling society, and is no doubt a product of substantial and successful pressure placed on government by the campaigning and lobbying work of actors in the disabled people's movement. The question that concerns me here, though, is the extent to which the elements of a disability counter-narrative that have been forced into government language by pressure from social movements can be permitted to displace the over-riding narrative crafted in the context of welfare reform. And in that over-riding context, these successes are, I think, read in very particular ways. That is, when the narrative is primarily framed by a crisis of too much spending leading to too much dependency, and by a resolution that therefore prioritizes the need to cut costs, the reader is invited to situate these successes within that narrative arc. Every successful partnership with disabled people's user-led organizations can be read as a justification that benefit cuts are part of a more benign package. Every individual success story of a disabled person can be read as the default position that should be embraced by all disabled people. The fundamental social critique of disability rights activism and of critical disability scholarship is neutralized by the narrative's relentless drive towards an individualized self-actualization. At the same time, what there is no place for in the narrative frame is any consideration of vulnerability, interdependence or, indeed, any embodied limitations.

We can see this narrative framing playing out in the last document I want to consider here. At around the same time that the *Fulfilling Potential – Making it Happen* document was being released, a House of Commons debate was held on a Labour motion to conduct a cumulative impact assessment of welfare reforms on disability (Hansard 2013). Overall, the debate involves a series of interventions by opposition MPs recounting the negative effects of changes to the benefits system on disabled people, with many examples drawn from their own constituents, disability organizations and the media, and responses in defence of the reforms from Conservative MPs. I want to focus on the interventions of one Conservative MP in this debate, the Conservative backbencher Paul Maynard. I am interested, here, in how the argument put forward in his defence of welfare reform interprets any attention to the negative effects of government policy as a slur on disabled people themselves. He does this by framing any attention to the vulnerabilities created by a disabling society (or, in this case, a disabling policy) as an attack on the capacities of disabled people, and draws on the *Fulfilling Potential* discourse to press this point. What is revealed here are some of the effects of the ‘colonisation and corruption’ (Morris 2011) of the social model in the government narrative. What is foreclosed is any consideration of the vulnerabilities produced by disabling policies, but also ultimately by the experiences of lived embodiment. The possibilities represented by critical disability scholarship and activism, which aim to reincorporate embodiment into social critique—and with it the lived experiences of frailty, debility, interrelationality and interdependence (see Wearing et al. 2015)—are shunted out of this dominant narrative and cannot be heard in any terms other than those framed by neo-liberal ‘capacitation’ (see Fritsch 2013). Here, it becomes the critique of welfare reform policy itself that has the disabling effect, by sapping disabled people of their confidence and aspiration.

The opening government position in the debate is presented by Mark Hoban, then Minister of State for Employment in the DWP, with responsibility for the Work Capability Assessment. Hoban restates the now-familiar case that work must be prioritized and that disability benefit reform is key to getting people into work:

**Mr Hoban:** What we need to do is make sure that we get more people into work, regardless of their disability, and we must help them into employment. [...]

Next week we will see the first ever disability employment conference, a flagship event funded by Government and business. [...] Over the next two years we will continue to work with business to bring about a new disability-confident perspective on employment and improve the employment outcomes for disabled people.

*I have no doubt that people want to work, but some are held back by a complex and unwieldy benefit system with weak or even non-existent incentives to work. Our plans for welfare reform will transform the benefits landscape. We have designed a new system with work as its focus—a coherent approach which ensures that people will be better off in work than on benefits. I firmly believe that the vast majority of people want to work and gain greater independence, but we also know that many disabled people who want to work fear the risk of losing their benefits and feel that that is too great a risk of getting into work. By simplifying the benefits system and making sure that work pays, universal credit will remove the financial risks of taking the first steps back into employment, and increase the incentives for working, even for a few hours a week.* (Hansard 2013: Column 412, emphasis added)

After several critical interventions by Labour MPs, Maynard makes his contribution. I quote this at length to demonstrate how the narrative is put together:

**Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con):**

*Labour's empty rhetoric and its sole focus on benefits as a measure of the quality of life of disabled people do a disservice to the wider disabled community.*

[...] We as a Government are seeking to edge towards greater recognition of the social model of disability, and that means not paying attention to the labels that too many want to hang around the necks of disabled people. The personal independence payment, for example, looks at how individuals cope with their own conditions and disabilities. It does not say, 'Tick box x for condition y and you will get these benefits.'

[...] If those on the Opposition Front Benches paid more attention to the 'Fulfilling Potential' report, they might be a little chilled by what they read. Page 34 states clearly:



*‘Young people’s aspirations can decline in response to their growing understanding of the world’. Listening to Opposition Members, I am sure that young people’s aspirations will decline because of the negative messages they are getting. The report states: ‘By the age of 26 disabled people are less confident’ about entering into the world. I think we should be celebrating the fact that this Government are taking steps on a broad range of measures—not merely disability benefits—that the previous Government never had the courage to take.*

*[...] How can we put a price on aspiration? How can we quantify hope? What do I say to disabled people using an organisation in my constituency that has just introduced a ‘Safe Journey’ card they can show on trams to ensure that it pulls away more slowly and they do not get flung to the ground? How are such things incorporated into the precious cumulative impact assessment? So much that can be done for the disabled community will never appear in any impact assessment, but it can be reflected in what we are doing with the ‘Fulfilling Potential’ initiative.*

I begin to despair at so much of what I hear from the Opposition Benches and it makes me truly angry. I pay tribute to the previous Government for their work to try to improve awareness of disability hate crime. However, *I react with fury to the reaction of so many Opposition Members when the reporting of incidents of disability hate crime increases because of work done by this Government, and the previous Government, to create an atmosphere in which people are more confident to report such crime. We are told that an increase in the reporting of hate crime is evidence of the Government’s war on the disabled. I find that disgusting. It is personally abhorrent that people should campaign in a partisan way on the backs of those in the most vulnerable section of our society, to make a partisan point. That does nothing.*

*The contribution of disabled people to this country goes far wider than the amount they receive in benefits. I recognise, however, that we cannot talk of aspiration or fulfilling potential if we do not have a stable system of state support. We are trying to ensure that the right people get the right amount of money to match their needs, abilities and aspirations to work, live their lives and fulfil their ambitions, not match the labels hung around their necks by the Labour party. (Hansard 2013: Column 419, emphasis added)*

On one level, Maynard’s speech is bit of particularly florid rhetoric and could be dismissed as the kind of debating club oratory that pushes an

argument to an extreme in order to win partisan political points. But its affect-laden tone also reveals the direction that the government narrative imposes through its underlying logic of inevitability. Like any effective narrative, it wants to close off the possibility of alternative accounts of the events it organizes, and Maynard does this relentlessly, through a number of rhetorical moves, some of which we also saw deployed in relation to equality policy, such as reducing any attention to collective sources of disadvantage to bureaucratic box-ticking and labelling. Opposition critiques of the reduction in benefits are reinterpreted as reducing questions of the quality of life of disabled people to the benefits they receive, and as negative messages to disabled people about what they can achieve. This echoes with the equality strategy framing that sees the previous government's approach as one of crude social engineering, and that aligns this government with respecting people's individuality. The government drive to cut down costs is reinterpreted as an embrace of the unquantifiable ('How can we put a price on aspiration? How can we quantify hope?'). But what Maynard's rhetorical flourish also makes clearer is what is foreclosed in this appeal to the individual. Since the crisis point in this narrative is not the embodied difference of the disabled person living in a society marked by 'compulsory able-bodiedness' (McRuer 2010) but, rather, the dependency on benefits, paying too much attention to the material embodied needs of disabled people only exacerbates the crisis. This brings us back to the rhetorical space of 'Shettleston Man' whose lack of aspiration is killing him. In this space, disabled people can either be cast as completely vulnerable, in which case they are deserving of state support, or they can completely transcend their embodied impairments like good neo-liberal subjects. Some messier middle ground—in which debilitated bodies, a product of both the 'slow death' (Berlant 2011) of neo-liberal capitalism and the diverse lived limitations of human embodiment, nevertheless live on without getting altogether better (Shildrick 2015)—is closed off from the telling.

In their work on 'narrative prosthesis' in literary texts, Mitchell and Snyder argue that the presence of a disabled body—a body that fails to fit the idealized social norm—is repeatedly used as the catalyst for storytelling. Something has gone amiss, and the narrative 'consolidates the need for its own existence by calling for an explanation of the deviation's origins and

formative consequences' (Mitchell and Snyder 2006: 209). The reliance on the disabled body as the 'prosthesis' on which the narrative depends has a long history in literature, where, they argue, '[n]arratives turn signs of cultural deviance into textually marked bodies' (ibid.). Narrative resolution is achieved when that marked body is either left behind or punished for its lack of conformity (ibid.: 210). In the context of neo-liberalism, we might add that a resolution can also be achieved when the debilitated body can be produced as 'susceptible to a range of market commodities that hold out the promise of therapeutic interventions' (Shildrick 2015: 10); that is, folded into the profitability regimes of a market economy.

But I would argue that, while we have seen elements of all these narrative resolutions in the policy documents discussed in this chapter, something else slightly different is also happening to the disabled body in this neo-liberal political narrative. Here, the crisis is not caused by bodily impairment, which is recast as being no obstacle to individual aspiration or achievement. In a way, this builds on an amenability already established in the social model of disability's tendency to downplay the importance of embodiment in favour of a critical focus on the ways in which social structures and social norms disable those with bodily impairments (see Shakespeare 2006; Roulstone et al. 2012; Inckle 2015). Instead, the primary crisis in this narrative is one of a failure to disavow the debilitating effects of dependency on the state, a failure to embrace the healing powers of work. Instead of positing a flawed and limiting body that must be transcended, as in the more familiar Cartesian model that Mitchell and Snyder discuss, here the body simply disappears from the narrative altogether. But we need to take note of what else is silenced when the imperfect body is erased. As others have argued (Goodley et al. 2014; Shildrick 2015; Kolarova 2014), if we take the body out of the story altogether, we foreclose on the possibilities of thinking personhood in terms that go beyond the limitations of 'compulsory able-bodiedness' (McRuer 2010) and of neo-liberal work-ability. This more complicated notion of personhood, which critical disability theory has been working to engender, is one that opens personhood up to its entanglements with relations of care, interdependency and interrelationality, dynamics that the relentless drive towards individual self-actualization must disavow (see Wearing et al. 2015). This notion of personhood would require us to think about

the body that fails, not in the conventional narrative terms of exceptional failure that must be taken in hand, surpassed or punished but, rather, in the unexceptional ‘normal, routine, average, and familiar’ ways that embodied subjects experience (Mitchell and Snyder 2006: 210). These unexceptional failures generally ‘fail to mobilise the storytelling’ (ibid.) in normative accounts, because they suggest the limits that all embodied subjects experience—indeed, they lead us to rethink what counts as normal. To incorporate such a notion of embodied personhood would require an entirely different political grammar from the one that underpinned Coalition disability policy.

While none of the story of disability being told in these policy documents is explicitly gendered, it seems to me that a large part of what its political grammar forecloses when it leaves this ordinary imperfect body behind is the social activity of reproductive care, which is always implicitly gendered. The place of care in disability discourses is itself contentious, as has been the relationship between disability activists and theorists, on the one hand, and some feminist calls for the revaluation of care, on the other (see Soldatic and Meekosha 2014: 204–205). Who gets to define and decide the conditions under which care is given and received is clearly a question of power relations. Any feminist interest in revaluing and redefining the role of reproductive care in society must recognize the complex and intersecting power inequalities at work in the relationships between disabled people, the state, private providers, and formal and informal carers, who are largely feminized and often racialized. But my point here is that none of this complex entanglement of imperfect bodies, interdependence and the unequal social relations of reproduction can find a way into the narrative order when the arc of crisis and resolution and the terms of address are so relentlessly focused on the relationship between subject/citizen and the productive world of work. Once again, as we saw with welfare reform policy, the reproductive sits as an uncomfortable excess to the vision of constrained entitlement being offered to the disabled person under austerity; it is what needs to be left out for the narrative to proceed in its own terms.

The problematic reproductive returns to centre stage, and is the object of more intensive and direct scrutiny in a further element of the overall narrative on welfare reform, the Coalition’s ‘social justice strategy’ and its focus on ‘troubled families’. I turn to these in Chap. 5.

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# 5

## Social Justice<sup>TM(DWP)</sup> and the Trouble with Families

In this chapter I look at two interlinked programmes introduced by the Coalition government in 2011–2012, the Social Justice Strategy developed by the Department for Work and Pensions, under Iain Duncan Smith, and the Troubled Families Programme developed by the Department for Communities and Local Government. Both these policies fit into the wider ‘Broken Britain’ narrative that had been developed by the Conservatives as part of their 2010 election campaign, and build on the groundwork established by Iain Duncan Smith’s Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), whose series of reports entitled *Breakdown Britain* (2006) and *Breakthrough Britain* (2007–2009), discussed in the chapters on welfare reform and disability, had begun the consolidation of a story that placed the dysfunctional family at the centre of the CSJ project for refashioning the welfare state. As we shall see, subsequent CSJ policy papers on the family, the need to ‘back marriage’ as a key pillar of social stability and progress, and the need to ‘turn around’ an allegedly large cohort of chaotic families (Centre for Social Justice 2011a, b, 2012) become the building blocks for the Coalition’s ‘new Social Justice Strategy’ and the aligned Troubled Families Programme. In this chapter, while drawing on some of the CSJ reports, I focus primarily on the Department for Work and

Pensions' March 2012 policy document 'Social Justice: Transforming Lives', and two documents issued in the same year by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), 'Listening to Troubled Families' (July 2012), and 'Working with Troubled Families' (December 2012) to trace the contours of this story about the need to 'turn around' the social justice agenda through turning around the lives of troubled families. In the process, I track how the language of social justice is turned on its head to become a story of bad individual choices and the crisis of troubled families becomes, among other things, a crisis of normative gender.

These policies need to be read in conjunction with the narrative on welfare reform that I explored in Chap. 3—putting the two together stitches normative gender and, in particular, the scrutinizing of poor women's reproductive practices, even more firmly into the narrative of welfare dependency. In many ways, the story of troubled families and the 'Social Justice' strategy that claims to be the solution to them is an explicit throwback to the underclass stories of fatherless families and women inappropriately 'married' to the state instead of to provider-husbands (see Tyler 2013). This narrative also has its antecedents in the policy discourse of New Labour, with initiatives such as the 'Respect Agenda' and the introduction of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, Parental Orders and Individual Behaviour Orders, which helped to consolidate what Tyler argues is a powerful myth about poverty as a psycho-cultural, rather than socio-economic, problem (Tyler 2013: 161–162). Indeed, despite claims to the contrary in the Coalition narrative, it is under New Labour that the language of a poverty of aspiration, of an intergenerational transmission of worklessness, and of the distinction between those trapped in welfare dependency and 'hard working families' begins to congeal. The Coalition narrative is also further complicated by the way it appropriates but then individualizes the problem of violence within the family—here, there is a gesture towards a certain feminist-light language of eliminating domestic violence, without the feminist critique of gendered power inequalities that feed the reproduction of gendered violence. This further 'culturalises' (Tyler 2013: 162) the problem of family dysfunction—in this case, turning attention away from the gendered structures and norms



in the wider society, and locating violence within an impoverished culture of worklessness, addiction and dependency.

The Social Justice strategy draws on many of the same narrative techniques we have seen evolving across the Coalition legislative agenda. There is the articulation of a crisis sited in the wrong-headed approach of the New Labour government which mistakes symptoms for causes, and a need to turn this logic around. The solution to this crisis is to turn to the individual and their capacity to take themselves in hand. The documents rely heavily on their narrative order to construct a particular set of cause and effect relations, and a particular relationship between the individual and the social, drawing on an affective language of disgust and shame to invite the reader to disavow individual lives and family forms marked by dysfunction and dependency. I now turn to a closer reading of these policy documents in order to trace how this narrative evolves.

## Rebranding Social Justice

‘Social Justice: Transforming Lives’ (Department for Work and Pensions 2012a) begins with a claim to offer a new definition of social justice, although it takes a close reading to unpick what that new definition is. The introduction to the document begins with the following statement, boxed and highlighted:

**Social Justice is about making society function better – providing the support and tools to help turn lives around.**

This is a challenging new approach to tackling poverty in all its forms. It is not a narrative about income poverty alone: this Government believes that the focus on income over the last decades has ignored *the root causes of poverty*, and in doing so has allowed social problems to deepen and become entrenched.

In this chapter we define Social Justice and describe the new set of principles that inform our approach:

1. A focus on **prevention and early intervention**
2. Concentrating on **recovery and independence, not maintenance**

3. Promoting **work for those who can as the most sustainable route out of poverty, while offering unconditional support to those who are severely disabled and cannot work**
4. Recognising that the most effective solutions will often be designed and delivered **at a local level**
5. Ensuring that interventions provide a **fair deal for the taxpayer**. (Department for Work and Pensions 2012a: 4, emphasis in the original)

The first thing we can note is that these principles, especially Principles 3–6, tether the Social Justice being defined here to the wider legislative agenda of welfare reform, localism and austerity, and so form part of the broader narrative about the need to shrink the central welfare state. Principle 2, with its focus on independence, also feeds into and off the neo-liberal discourse underpinning the argument about welfare reform. The evocation of prevention in Principle 1, together with the claim to be turning to the root causes of poverty that have allegedly been ignored for too long, signals an attempt to undercut and appropriate the language of the left in order to push this neo-liberal agenda.

But what are these root causes that this new version of Social Justice aims to address? Here, I think we need, first, to pay attention to the narrative order that structures the document. Immediately following this opening statement, we turn to an account of an individual chaotic life:

Barry was drug dependent, as was his father before him. His mother, an alcoholic, split from Barry's father and met another man, at whose hands Barry was physically abused. Barry was taken into care.

Barry was drinking by the time he was 10, using cannabis by 11 and heroin at 15. Quickly turning to crime to fund his habit, he spent the next 17 years in and out of prison. When not in prison he was parked on benefits, money spent either on feeding himself or feeding his habit.

Barry is not alone. We live in one of the richest countries in the world, yet we still see that inequality is rife and social problems endemic. Growing up in broken communities and facing multiple disadvantages, too many find themselves passing on their difficult circumstances from one generation to the next.

**This can result in complex and interlinking disadvantages, often with roots traceable to early life. Social Justice is about providing support and tools to transform lives.** (Department for Work and Pensions 2012a: 5, emphasis in the original)

The foreword to the document, signed by Iain Duncan Smith, also operates with the same kind of narrative order, beginning with an individual anecdote:

I was recently handed a report by a charity containing images and sculptures created by a number of vulnerable children. One of the scenes was produced by ten young people whose parents were substance abusers and the caption below the photo read as follows:

The house of children whose parents are addicted to crack cocaine. Dad has passed out on the mattress in his own vomit, mum is crouched over a table, preparing her fix. What you don't see is the child hidden in the corner. (Department for Work and Pensions 2012a: 1)

This technique of beginning with an individual anecdote is, of course, a familiar part of political rhetoric. It signals the politician's attachment to the 'real world' of 'real people', and to addressing 'real problems'. But when the narrative claims to be identifying heretofore ignored or misunderstood root causes, this narrative order does something else as well. It invites us to see the catalogue of individual bad choices and behaviours that each of these anecdotes presents, including family breakdown (including women with multiple partners in this definition), crime, addiction, worklessness (understood as the refusal to work, rather than anything to do with the availability of work and the conditions of available work—of being 'parked on benefits', in Barry's case) and welfare dependency, as the *necessary* starting point for considering first causes.

In both the foreword and the introduction, we then move from individual anecdote on to claims to quantify the problem these anecdotes are meant to represent. In the introduction, we move from Barry to a set of statistics about worklessness, lone parent families and dropping marriage rates, educational attainment failures, drug and alcohol dependency, debt and crime (Department for Work and Pensions 2012a: 5–7). These are

then brought together to consider how to ‘measure multiple disadvantage’ producing two quantifications. The first, the ‘estimate that there are 120,000 families living particularly troubled and chaotic lives’ will be examined later in the context of the Troubled Families Programme. Here, I note the second, that ‘11 percent of adults (5.3 million people) in the UK experience, at any one time, three or more of six areas of disadvantage (education, health, employment, income, social support, housing and local environment)’ (Department for Work and Pensions 2012a: 8).

What has happened here? In telling the story in this way, the narrative structure itself leads the reader to infer that the structural inequalities implicit in these six ‘areas of disadvantage’ derive from the bad choices and dysfunctional behaviours associated both with individual stories like Barry’s and with the wider picture of worklessness, non-normative families, educational failure, substance abuse, debt and crime of which his experience is exemplary. The ‘areas of disadvantage’ listed here are seen as the product of these bad behaviours, rather than being looked at as intrinsically unequal social structures, which would be the focus of a more critical sociological analysis of what creates or prevents social justice. It is only after this establishing of cause and effect relations between (bad) individual agency and (neutral) social structure that another set of preoccupations of those interested in social justice are named, only to be dismissed. The document acknowledges that ‘factors like ethnicity, gender or disability’ may exacerbate disadvantage (ibid.: 8), but then brackets them off with the statement: ‘[T]his strategy does not focus on these factors as themes – rather it looks at the areas of disadvantage and how best to tackle them’ (ibid.). Structural inequalities are explicitly, then, not part of this Social Justice strategy. Instead, the document tells us (in a footnote) that they are being dealt with elsewhere in the government’s policies.

Perhaps this is why the document is so committed to its consistent capitalization of Social Justice—to register for the reader that this is not the familiar understanding of social justice as concept, that it is something entirely new and different. Indeed, from his founding of the Centre for Social Justice in 2004, Iain Duncan Smith has been passionate about appropriating this concept more commonly associated with the left to a very different political project, one that, crucially, is about individualiz-

ing the social in Social Justice. While claiming to focus on ‘root causes’—which, in a more conventional usage of social justice, would turn attention to social and structural inequalities—this version of Social Justice makes a claim to resite those roots primarily in individual bad choices and behaviours, and, through its preoccupation with the family and reproduction processes, in the erosion of a particular set of highly gendered social norms.

The recasting of Social Justice is another element of the narrative’s disavowal of a particular version of the past, which associates that past with a ‘narrow preoccupation with income’ as a measure of poverty and disadvantage. Again, this shifts the terrain of what are causes and what are effects, with statements such as ‘Frequently, very low income is a symptom of deeper problems, whether that is family breakdown, educational failure, welfare dependency, debt, drug dependency or some other relevant factor’ (Department for Work and Pensions 2012a: 10) which are tied into the broader narrative about welfare dependency and the redemptive power of work (*ibid.*: 9–10). Here, New Labour’s project to eliminate child poverty, which measured poverty primarily via income indicators, is something to be disavowed, because, as here, income is defined only as a symptom, rather than a ‘root cause’. Focus on tax credits to lift people above the poverty line is seen as doing little to ‘change the course of their lives’ (*ibid.*: 9). Instead, rehearsing arguments we saw in Chap. 3, that some income (i.e., benefits) is not necessarily beneficial, the document argues that only income from work ‘can change lives – boosting confidence and self-esteem, providing a structure to people’s lives and giving them a stake in their community’ (*ibid.*: 10).

This set of claims should also be read in the context of the Coalition attempts to introduce a new way of measuring child poverty that downgrades the importance of material deprivation and, instead, turns attention to other ‘dimensions’ such as whether parents work, have the necessary skills to ‘get on’, or are in stable family relationships (see Department for Work and Pensions 2012b). This new definition of child poverty was—no doubt, not coincidentally—being pushed in a context where a range of austerity measures were disproportionately hitting low-income families with children, including working families (see Ridge 2013; Stewart and Obolenskaya 2015). But it is also reflective of the

underlying view, consistent with Duncan Smith's vision of Social Justice, that a reinstatement of the normative family is required. We see this argument worked out more fully in the first chapter of the Social Justice strategy, entitled 'Supporting families'.

## Social Justice and the Normative Family

The chapter begins with the statement that the family is the first and most important building block in a child's life and 'any government serious about delivering Social Justice must seek to strengthen families' (Department for Work and Pensions 2012a: 15). Family instability or breakdown are presented as the major source of a range of social problems: a history of offending is linked to witnessing violence in the home, or experiencing abuse as a child; homelessness is seen as an effect of family breakdown; increased involvement in crime is framed as an effect of 'separation from a biological parent, high family conflict and multiple transitions into new families' (ibid.: 15). Throughout the chapter, the connections between unstable families or problems within the family, on the one hand, and problems in relation to employment, education, mental health and crime, on the other, are hardened into cause and effect relationships. The selective use of research, and its reductive representation—what Ruth Levitas (2012) has called 'policy-based evidence'—are marshalled to present a picture in which all social problems can be traced back to that initial building block. But what is of more interest to me here is that the attachment of this focus on the family to a notion of Social Justice invites us—indeed, gives us permission—to locate the solution to these problems in a highly normative, traditional fantasy of the family. While making some concessions to the advances made by feminist and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) critiques of the normative heterosexual family, these concessions always seem to come with a health warning, as in the following passage:

Evidence also suggests that children tend to enjoy better life outcomes when the same two parents are able to give them support and protection

throughout their childhood [...] This is not to say that lone-parents and step families cannot provide high levels of love and support for children – all types of family structure have the potential to provide the stability that is vital for enabling good outcomes. But – whilst this is not the case in every situation – *we should recognise that the impact of multiple relationship transitions and changes in family structure are particularly detrimental to children. So, where it is practicable and safe, the presence of the same two parents in a warm, stable relationship throughout childhood is particularly important.* (Department for Work and Pensions 2012a: 16, emphasis added)

The document continues in this fashion, on the one hand, conceding that unmarried couples can be good parents, or that ‘the way in which a family functions has even more effect on outcomes for children than the type of family structure’ (ibid.) but, on the other, arguing that ‘this Government believes marriage often provides an excellent environment in which to bring up children. So the Government is clear that marriage should be supported and encouraged’ and that ‘we should be concerned’ about the long-term trend in all types of family breakdown—including falling marriage rates, and the rise in the number of lone-parent households (ibid.: 17). If it is true that how families function is more important than a particular family structure, then why revert to these as indicators of ‘breakdown’? In fact, throughout the chapter, marriage stands in for family stability, and where the preservation of a marriage proves impossible, there is still a sense that all other relationships should be measured against, and try to replicate as closely as possible ‘the security provided by a family unit’ (Department for Work and Pensions 2012a: 25) based around marriage. The document sets its approach off from previous government policy here, arguing that New Labour had exacerbated the trend in family breakdown, through the ‘couple penalty’ in the welfare system (discussed in Chap. 3), through treating symptoms and not causes (meaning failing to prevent relationship breakdown), and through an antagonistic family maintenance system that did not encourage people to make family-based arrangements, seeing the ‘statutory route’ as taking responsibility away from parents and causing conflict and hostility (Department for Work and Pensions 2012a: 17). Under the aptly titled heading ‘Changing the narrative’, the chapter argues:

The Government is determined to change the terms of debate round the family. Too often we are told that government action has unexpected consequences and can drive people – families, parents, couples – into making decisions that are at odds with their natural preferences. We need to row back from that approach. (2012a: 17)

This absolute conviction that marriage must be defended and strengthened, and that marriage is a ‘Social Justice issue’ is one of the strongest themes to emerge from the work of the Centre for Social Justice. Two CSJ documents from 2011 expand on the normative gendered underpinnings of this conviction. In ‘History and Family’—a rejoinder to historian Pat Thane’s 2010 British Academy pamphlet ‘Happy Families?’, in which she challenges the claim that the ‘non-marital family’ is a particularly recent and necessarily problematic development—the CSJ insists that ‘fractured, chaotic or fatherless families’ are at the heart of the social breakdown ‘devastating our most deprived communities’ (Centre for Social Justice 2011a: 4). Reworking one of the key tropes of the underclass narrative, it waxes eloquent on the civilizing effect of marriage, especially on men:

The act of making a commitment, when preceded and inspired by a decision of walk through and work through all the challenges of life together, can profoundly change a couple’s emotional outlook. [...]

Marriage [...] draws men in particular, into a durable relational framework that emphasises the enormous importance of their role as fathers to their children and co-provider to the household income. (Centre for Social Justice 2011a: 9)

In ‘Strengthening the Family’ (CSJ 2011b), subtitled ‘fatherlessness, dysfunction and parental separation and divorce’, these themes are further expanded, while making an explicit link to the 2011 riots, claiming that family breakdown and fatherlessness needed to be understood as important factors leading to the large-scale civil disturbance that broke out across many UK cities in August 2011 (2011b: 1). Marriage, it is argued, draws men into ‘responsible fatherhood’ and gives ‘those who are lacking in purpose something to live and work for beyond themselves’, while ‘breaking the link between parenthood and marriage has intro-



duced massive instability into society in general' (2011b: 2). The gendered nature of poverty, especially for women single parents, is noted, but then individualized by being tied to the absence of fathers, rather than any wider gendered power relations. The state's role in either alleviating or exacerbating that gendered inequality is refused through a reference to Sweden, claiming that 'even in the most generous welfare regime in the world, the state does not and cannot prevent single parenthood's link with poverty' (ibid.). Finally, in 'Forgotten Families' (Centre for Social Justice 2012), the Coalition is castigated for not going far enough in realizing that the 'overriding priority of family policy' should be family breakdown and in particular the importance of marriage (Centre for Social Justice 2012: 1). Coalition policies on flexible working, parental leave and childcare—extremely modest interventions to reflect changing social norms around gender relations—are seen as counterproductive in that they undermine the central point that 'marriage is a social justice issue' (2012: 8) and a key part of preventing social breakdown. Here, the more subtle 'health warning' about non-normative families in the Social Justice strategy is made more explicit:

If the Government constantly emphasises the obvious truth that families come in all shapes and sizes, and ignores the differences in outcome from different types of families, they short-change those in many lower-income families who already face high barriers to marriage – as well as young people who consistently express high aspirations to marry. (Centre for Social Justice 2012: 9)

The specific concern with men and marriage, together with the ways this narrative was being particularly pushed in the context of the 2011 riots, reveal how this argument relies on a very conservative set of assumptions about stability in gender relations being necessary to social order. Social Justice, then, is ultimately about reinstating the traditional middle-class fantasy of the heterosexual family, in which male breadwinners provide for that family, women reproduce but not in excess and with one man, and families deal with their problems within the space of the private sphere.

Two final issues need to be noted in the Social Justice strategy as it relates to families. The first is the repeated insistence that Social Justice

requires the elimination of domestic violence, but without any acknowledgement that gendered violence is more than individual bad behaviour, or another indicator of the individual abjected, chaotic family. To acknowledge this would be, of course, to disrupt the seamless account of marriage as source of stability, to introduce a distracting sub-plot that might suggest otherwise. This is one place where we see the full bankruptcy of an account of social justice that remains tethered to the bad choices or poor coping mechanisms of individuals. To claim repeatedly that you are committed to eliminating domestic violence without considering how the institution of marriage might be entangled with the gendered inequalities and normative constructions of the public–private divide that underpin and mark violence inside the family, is to appropriate feminist claims without the underlying social analysis that produced them. It aims to add a feminist gloss to a strategy and a narrative that systematically undoes the premises of a gendered analysis of social structures and subjectivities.

Second, the strategy begins the work, developed further in the Troubled Families programme, of measuring, classifying and monitoring a particular abjected population that need to be taken in hand. Here, the neo-liberal governmentality of the strategy is foregrounded, where the state intervenes forcefully to identify those who fail to exercise the necessary self-correcting and self-regulating qualities of the neo-liberal citizen. We saw above how indicators of structural disadvantage are turned into measures of individual failure. Phrases such as ‘families with five or more social problems’ (Department for Work and Pensions 2012a: 28), peppered throughout the document, then become a shortcut, not for attending to the social problems referenced, but for the families who will be classified as the targets of scrutiny and control. Each local area is called upon, not to address the social problems of homelessness, unemployment, gendered violence, and so on, but to identify their ‘most troubled families’ and appoint coordinators to ‘ensure these families get the interventions they need’ (ibid.: 22). As elsewhere in this project, what I am interested in here is not to evaluate the interventions that are put into place by this policy. Others have analysed the specific strengths and weaknesses of the Troubled Families programme as it has been implemented (see Montgomerie and Tepe-Belfrage 2016; Crossley 2016; Hayden and

Jenkins 2014). My focus is on the story being told about troubled families and how its narrative frames the relationship between individual failed citizens and the state, and the ways in which normative gender seeps through and is sedimented across this narrative. I now turn to the narrative underpinning the Troubled Families programme itself.

## Troubling Families

The Troubled Families programme was introduced by David Cameron in December 2011. His speech begins quite clearly on the terrain of this relationship between the state and the individual:

my mission in politics – the thing I am really passionate about – is fixing the responsibility deficit. That means building a stronger society, in which more people understand their obligations, and more take control over their own lives and actions.

For a long time I was criticised for talking about the broken society. But I believe that it's only by recognising the problem that we can fix what's gone wrong. And this summer we saw, beyond doubt, that something has gone profoundly wrong. The riots were a wake-up call – not a freak incident but a boiling over of problems that had been simmering for years.

Talking about those problems is difficult territory for politicians. You're talking about blame, about good behaviour and bad behaviour, about morals. And sometimes, you are singling out people whose actions have an impact on us all. It can sound judgemental, even hypocritical. As a result, too many politicians have shrunk from addressing these things and stuck their heads in the sand. I refuse to do that.

As I said after the riots, I have a duty to speak clearly, frankly and truthfully about the problems in our society ... and an equal duty to do whatever it takes to fix them. (Cameron 2011)

Here, Cameron indulges in a familiar rhetorical move regularly repeated by him (and other Conservative politicians) in defending Coalition policies. Adopting the stance of 'speaking truth to power', he positions himself as daring to articulate a common-sense truth that the forces of political correctness would seek to censor. The repeated use of

phrases such as ‘it is only fair’, ‘I have a duty to speak frankly’ and ‘I believe it is right to say’ works both to present oneself positively and to overstate the power of those critical of one’s stance. In his work on the linguistic strategies deployed in personal and media narratives to reproduce racism while denying its existence, Teun van Dijk (1992) identified very similar techniques at work. In particular, he highlighted the double strategy of positive self-presentation and overstating the power of the minority to censor those who are simply ‘speaking the truth’. This simultaneously masks the position of power from which the speaker makes their claims and gives them permission to stigmatize those who would disagree with their world view. Here, similar strategies are deployed to reproduce another abjected population, the troubled families ‘breaking Britain’.

Cameron then goes on both to qualify and to quantify what is meant by a troubled family:

I want to talk about troubled families. Let me be clear what I mean by this phrase. 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.

We’ve always known that these families cost an extraordinary amount of money ...

... but now we’ve come up the actual figures.

Last year the state spent an estimated £9 billion on just 120,000 families ...

...that is around £75,000 per family. (Cameron 2011)

The ability to put both a name and, especially, a highly specific number, and exact cost to the phenomenon that is being constructed here is crucial to the effectiveness of the truth claims being made. The apparent precision of the numbers allows Cameron, and all the documents relating to the Troubled Families programme, to press the argument that this part of the population must be identified and dealt with, because it is their individual actions that impose unreasonably disproportionate costs on

the wider society. The power of these apparently precise numbers in a world where what counts is what can be counted, and the story of an urgent need that must be met, places those identified as troubled in a particular relationship to the state. This feeds into a sense of infantilization (they cannot help themselves and need to be forcibly disciplined into functionality) and abjection, where normal citizenship rights can be suspended for the good of both themselves and society. Indeed, the Troubled Families programme, for the first time, allowed local councils to access the benefit records of families without their informed consent. As Louise Casey, head of the programme, stated, 'We need to find out what is happening in relation to all of the data. I don't think it's about someone's civil rights. I think it's about their right to get help and the system's right to challenge them to take it' (Ramesh 2012).

In fact, as Levitas (2012), Hayden and Jenkins (2014) and Crossley (2016) have shown, the original figure of 120,000 troubled families was an extrapolation from research published in 2007 by New Labour (based on data from 2004) which looked at families experiencing multiple disadvantages. These disadvantages tended to be markers of social and economic inequality and included housing conditions, material deprivation and health problems. But, by 2011, in the context of the Troubled Families programme, these social disadvantages had morphed into three main identifying criteria of crime/anti-social behaviour, educational exclusion and worklessness (Crossley 2016), while keeping the same headline figures. The focus on these three indicators enables a shift in the narrative from structural inequalities to individual behaviours, as we will see later. Nevertheless, the relentless repetition of these 'factoids' (Levitas 2012) has made for a compelling story. As Cameron said:

And I hate the idea that we should just expect to pay ever larger amounts in welfare to an ever larger chunk of society ... and never expect the recipients to change their lives.

Our heart tells us we can't just stand by while people live these lives and cause others so much misery. Our head tells us we can't afford to keep footing the monumental bills for social failure. So we have got to take action to turn troubled families around. (Cameron 2011)

Echoing Theresa May's promise to turn around the equalities agenda in order to individualize our understanding of inequality, and to make state intervention part of the problem, Cameron evokes the language of 'turning around' in order to argue for a changed relationship between the state and these defective citizen-subjects:

We've also got to change completely the way government interacts with them; the way the state intervenes in their lives. To be fair to the last government, they did try to make a difference. We can't accuse them of under-doing the welfare and the social programmes. The problem, particularly in the past ten years, has actually been an excess of unthinking, impersonal welfare. Put simply: tens of thousands of troubled families have been subjected to a sort of compassionate cruelty ... swamped with bureaucracy, smothered in welfare yet never able to escape. (Cameron 2011)

And yet, this is not actually an argument for the state retreating from the lives of these troublesome subjects, since they must be identified, located and scrutinized in order to discipline them into eventual self-sufficiency:

We can only act if we know where troubled families live. Up to now we've talked in terms broad numbers – 120,000 troubled families across the country. Today we are announcing, council by council, our estimate from data, mapping where these families are. To give you an idea of the scale of the problem, there are an estimated 4,500 of these families in Birmingham, 2,500 in Manchester, and 1,115 here in Sandwell. But setting out the data is just the start. We need to move quickly from broad estimates to actual names and addresses. By February we want local authorities to have identified who the troubled families are, where they live and what services they use. (Cameron 2011)

This intense scrutiny of remedial subjects is presented as both pressing, but also 'simple'—the problem of the past was to smother these people in too-complex bureaucracy and too-generous welfare systems; the solution is to turn the surveillance powers of the state on to a set of easily counted indicators of individual behaviour, and to tie funding to the achievement of the appropriate behavioural changes:

The next step will be to get in there and start working with families. So today I can announce the financial firepower we're putting behind this task. We are committing £448 million to turning around the lives of 120,000 troubled families by the end of this Parliament. This money has got to do its job. Our offer to councils is that we will fund 40% of the cost if they match this with 60%. And crucially this payment depends on results.

Simple tests such as ...

... are the children going to school?

... how many people have they got back into work?

... have they stopped – and I mean completely stopped – anti-social behaviour?

... how many crimes have been prevented?

This will take a concerted effort from all corners of Government.  
(Cameron 2011)

As discussed above, the Social Justice and Troubled Families programmes hinge on bending data about socio-economic disadvantage into telling a story about individual failures. The 'simple tests' Cameron cites are part of this process of winnowing down to indicators that could be presented as being within the control of individuals and, therefore, of turning attention to individual choices alone. As Montgomerie and Tepe-Belfrage have noted, the Troubled Families programme started out with a scoping study that defined and categorized a 'Troubled Family' as meeting five out of seven criteria: having a low income; no one in the family who is working; poor housing; parents who have no qualifications; where the mother has a mental health problem; one parent has a long-standing illness or disability; and where the family is unable to afford basics, including food and clothes (Montgomerie and Tepe-Belfrage 2016: 13). But when it became clear that many of these seven criteria were beyond the control of families, this was whittled down to meeting three out of four criteria which are more easily individualized—*involvement in youth crime or anti-social behaviour; regular truancy; an adult on out-of-work benefits; causing high costs to the taxpayer (ibid.).* In the process, they argue, the intense focus on parenting skills of the Troubled Families Programme turns these into 'actionable behaviours that can be addressed to solve almost everything from poverty, social exclusion, crime and anti-social behaviour to poor health' (ibid.: 15).

The first major report of the Troubled Families programme was Louise Casey's 'Listening to Troubled Families', published in July 2012. This 68-page report, based on interviews with 16 families, is as interesting for its form as its content. Following a brief foreword and introduction, the 16 case studies are presented without comment or analysis, over 40 pages, as apparently transparent artefacts of the 'listening' process. This, the reader is invited to believe, is the unvarnished truth of the troubles families face, but also the trouble families get themselves into, and the trouble they create for the society around them. As Ruth Levitas has argued in looking at the way the DCLG website describes the Troubled Families programme, there is a 'discursive move from families that have troubles, through families that are 'troubled', to families that are or cause trouble' (Levitas 2012: 5). Much of this discursive sleight of hand is initiated in these individual cases, where we are told of children with ADHD in one family, of a single-parent victim of violence in another, each telling a story of multiple problems and of an inability to cope. As in Cameron's account above, the state figures as an agent of 'unthinking, impersonal welfare', of ineffectual bureaucracy and 'compassionate cruelty', as an over-costly but ineffective presence in the lives of each chaotic family. What is particularly interesting, if we want to track how gender figures in this narrative, is that every story is one of some form of non-normative family arrangement—single parents, step-parents, multiple partners—that also involves violence, sexual abuse, drugs, or mental health issues. This tethering of multiple social and individual problems—which I would not want to deny or underestimate—to non-normative gender arrangements is more fully revealed in the final part of the document, which draws the individual stories together to articulate the lessons to be drawn.

The lessons learned are grouped around 14 issues: intergenerational transmission, large numbers of children, shifting family make-up, dysfunctional relationships, the anti-social family and friends network, abuse, institutional care, teenaged mothers, violence, early signs of poor behaviour, school, anti-social behaviour, mental health—depression, and drugs and alcohol (DCLG 2012a). The first five of these, together with the section on teenaged mothers, clearly set up a framework in which individual inappropriate reproductive arrangements take centre stage.



Again, narrative order invites a particular focus on the reproductive activities of poor women. Bad individual choices about how and how much to reproduce are seen as key to understanding how families can make trouble for society. A primary lesson is the danger of intergenerational transmission: failing families breed more bad families and, while it may well be true that disadvantage as well as personal troubles can be passed on from one generation to another—that how we interact with each other has long-lasting consequences—the story being told here is one of a narrow focus on family dynamics in isolation from the contributing factors of the wider society. The object of scrutiny, then, becomes the individual mother and whether she has the capacity to cope, to breed wisely and responsibly, and not to create undue burdens for the wider society to have to deal with. The focus on intergenerational transmission also echoes the language of welfare reform, and the mythical figure of ‘three generations without work’ that we saw in Chap. 3:

We did not meet many families whose problems did not start in their own childhood, or whose children, or some of their children, were not now repeating the same patterns as their parents. Intergenerational transmission of problems such as being in care, poor parenting, violence, abuse, low aspirations, non-attendance in school and few or no qualifications was rife. (DCLG 2012a: 46)

Underpinning this concern is the wider social anxiety to contain and control women’s reproductive practices. As many feminist theorists of birth have argued (see Tyler 2000; Battersby 1998; Baraitser 2009) it is women’s ‘troubling talent for making other bodies (Haraway 1991: 253), as well as their pivotal role in reproducing social norms and cultures (Yuval-Davis 1997), that always seems to be sitting beneath the surface when talk turns to the reproduction or degeneration of normative order. The control of women’s reproductive activities is thus always about more than the individual woman herself; rather, it is about reinstating a particular social order through managing the female reproductive body.

We see this next in the focus on too-large families: troubled families are defined, in part, by their characteristic of having large numbers of children, by overbreeding, and by teenaged mothers breeding too early.

Crucial to this narrative move is to position women as not being fully in control of their reproductive activities themselves and, therefore, as in need of outside control:

When asked about why they had had so many children, there was also a strong sense of pregnancies ‘just happening’ as if it was not in their control to prevent them occurring.[...]

Many of the parents were little more than children themselves when they started having children, and came from troubled backgrounds where their experience of being parented was, in many cases, extremely poor. So they had little to go on when they became parents themselves, and were struggling to cope even when they had fewer children. (Department for Communities and Local Government 2012a: 47)

They are also characterized by a ‘shifting family makeup’—here, the intrinsic instability of families who reproduce outside of marriage is asserted, echoing the concerns of the Centre for Social Justice documents and of the Social Justice strategy overall. Women reproducing outside of marriage, and with multiple partners, are cast as irresponsible sources of chaos, as necessarily producing instability and trouble for themselves and their children:

Many families we spoke to were extended networks of half siblings and step siblings; mothers had taken on step children, some of whom had children of their own; biological fathers were absent; new boyfriends came and went; some children grew up in and out of care. [...]

Extended family networks, traditionally viewed in society as positive influencers, in these cases tended to be characterised by instability and chaos, with new arrivals often being frightening and bringing trouble with them, or affecting existing stable relationships. [...]

The majority of the families described absent biological fathers and fathers taking a very casual approach to parenthood and relationships. For example, as soon as the relationship between the parents breaks down, the father disappears from the family never to be heard of again. [...]

Commonly, the women also described short casual relationships which lead to pregnancy and a child, after which the fathers are rarely around. (Department for Communities and Local Government 2012a: 47–48)

This trouble then bleeds out to the wider society, and to the relationship with the state through its role in breeding anti-social networks of family and friends, infecting whole communities and cultures.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, those we interviewed move in social networks of people who share similar backgrounds, problems and characteristics. Very often that was extended family rather than friends. Of course while those who suffered domestic violence did not actively choose violent partners, they may be used to, vulnerable to, or not surprised by violence in partners. [...]

Neighbours, friends or extended family who live close to but not necessarily in same household as the family exert a strong influence over its culture. One woman who described asking for help over the behaviour of her son was told 'just smack your kids', and another's mother told her to put her kids in care. [...]

The impression of families' isolation from more 'normal' or positive friends or networks came across strongly. While many families moved around from one place to another fleeing violence, others had never left the area they had grown up in. Their partners came from the same street or moved between women in the area. They tended to stick within a network of other dysfunctional peers. [...]

However, it would be wrong to characterise what is happening in these families as problems that are hidden behind closed doors. Their problems often spill out into the street and are played out in public, and have a significant impact on the people who live around them. (Department for Communities and Local Government 2012a: 50)

A quasi cause and effect relationship is, then, established between the failure to reproduce in the context of one stable and socially sanctioned relationship—the normative family—and the failure to keep one's problems within the confines of that family. Thus, non-normative family formations—including reproducing outside of marriage, the presence of more than one father, step-families—would appear to result in the problem of having excessive ongoing relationships with social services, children going in and out of care, and so on. Here, it is the failure to produce a recognizable, normative private sphere that causes the trouble of bringing in the public sphere to have to 'sort out' the troubles families can get themselves into.

Families also have dysfunctional relationship with the organisations that exist to help them and protect their children. Many of the families complained about professionals or agencies involved with them, and in particular, social services. However it would not be fair to always lay the blame there when looked at dispassionately. Undoubtedly, some families have reason to feel let down. But there were *often unwarranted feelings that their problems were not of their making, and that they had no control over the problem or its solution*; that it was they that had highlighted problems, with services simply failing to intervene and do what they were entitled to expect of them. (Department for Communities and Local Government 2012a: 51, emphasis added)

Throughout, and with a cumulative effect, there is an individualizing account of dysfunctional relationships with statements such as ‘many people are just not very good at relationships’ and ‘Their inability to form effective and positive relationships was often pivotal and played out across their lives with regard to their relationship with their partners, as parents, with their neighbours, friends and associates – and indeed with the myriad of agencies and services that work with them.’ (Department for Communities and Local Government 2012a: 48). These judgements position the poor single mother, in particular, as a remedial subject who both creates and then can’t cope with the dysfunctional relationships around her. It is this defectiveness (rather than the possibility that maybe some of the problems were not of their making, or under their control) that both creates the drain on public services, compelling the state and its institutions to intervene in what ought to be dealt with privately (if only these women were better neo-liberal subjects), and further evidences their failure through their resistance to being properly disciplined by those agencies of the state.

The individualizing account becomes particularly pernicious when it is applied to the question of domestic violence and sexual abuse. Violence and abuse are acknowledged as serious problems facing women and their children:

Most of the women we spoke to had had a series of very difficult relationships, which seemed to repeat themselves. The majority involved domestic violence. (Department for Communities and Local Government 2012a: 49)

and

Close to three quarters of those interviewed were families where the mother had suffered domestic abuse, and in some cases with daughters who then went on to suffer violence with their own partners. Violence was a reason for entering care, for moving house, for escaping partners. (Department for Communities and Local Government 2012a: 53)

But there is no discussion of what wider gendered and sexualized power relations might be at work in perpetuating that violence and abuse. They just ‘seemed to repeat themselves’. In the absence of some wider social analysis, how are we to read this passive ‘seemed to repeat themselves’? Is it inviting us to see violence as something these defective subjects just fall into, or is it suggesting that violence somehow just happens and is reproduced cross-generationally, in these kinds of exceptional, dysfunctional relationships and cultures? Either way, the power inequalities at the heart of *normative* gender are erased from view, feeding into the prevailing common-sense view that gendered violence is a problem of the poor and the marginalized, rather than intrinsic to all unequal gendered relations. This kind of framing is repeated when considering child sexual abuse:

Some discussed it as if *as it was almost expected and just a part of what they had experienced in life*. Others were all too aware of how tragic and damaging its consequences could be, and talked extensively about the injustice of their sufferings as children.

What was clear is that children often had not been protected by their parents. In many of the families the sexual abuse repeated itself in the next generation; not necessarily by the abused as perpetrator (particularly if the abused was female), but by others in or around the family. (Department for Communities and Local Government 2012a: 52)

Statements like these gesture towards acknowledging the deep-seated nature of abuse while, at the same time, refusing to follow through that gesture to a questioning of the power imbalances underpinning gendered and sexual norms. The normalizing of violence and abuse—what is ‘almost expected and just a part of what they had experienced in life’—is

turned back on the individual women, rather than outwards to the social forces to which they have been subjected. Women are presented here as unwitting victims at best, or, at worst, as complicit in reproducing violence because of their own individual dysfunction and inadequacy:

In many cases mothers used violence on their children to discipline them and the way some families talked about it, violence seemed almost normal behaviour. (Department for Communities and Local Government 2012a: 56)

The problem with this way of framing the problem of interpersonal violence against women and children is that, when the seriousness of the problem is flagged at the same time that attention to the structural is refused, all that is left is to conclude that there are serious individual failings at work. If the crisis is one of individual inadequacy, then the solution is an intensified scrutiny and disciplining of these inadequate subjects. We can see this simultaneous refusal to look for the structural underpinnings of violence and permission to take the defective family in hand in the following progression of statements from the report's conclusion. First:

And it certainly isn't *the intention to try to establish what lies behind some of the darkest aspects of social and familial problems such as violence and sexual abuse*. But what can be established, and perhaps the starkest message to take from these interviews, is the extent to which the problems of these families are linked and reinforcing. They accumulate across the life course, passed on from parents to their children across generations of the same family. (Department for Communities and Local Government 2012a: 64, emphasis added)

If there is no attempt—no need, it would seem—to 'try to establish what lies behind' these problems, then the family as social institution does not need to be interrogated, only the failure of some to conform to its current norms. The solution to this crisis is then to reinstate (or instate for the first time) what is understood as normative family functioning:

And at the most fundamental level is an absence of basic family functioning which must be restored (or created for the first time) if these families

are to really change. (Department for Communities and Local Government 2012a: 64)

If the crisis is one of individual failing families, and reinstating the normative family as institution is the solution, then there must be a root-and-branch reform of these failed families:

Their behaviours and problems can be properly understood only by looking at the full cycle – and the full family. This requires services who work with families to take the long view; of what happened to the parents as children and of what has happened to the children since birth. This may not be a pretty sight, and will lay bare the extent of the dysfunction that is accumulated in the lives of some of these families. (Department for Communities and Local Government 2012a: 64)

On one level—the focus on the ‘whole family’—the ‘full cycle’ seems to make perfect sense. It claims to appeal to a desire, as in the Social Justice strategy, to get at root causes and to address whole and complex processes, instead of providing piecemeal reactions to individual symptoms. It positions the narrator, and appeals to the reader, as courageous subjects who are willing to look a problem in the face, even if it not ‘a pretty sight’, to do the difficult thing, which is the right thing, as in Cameron’s speech. But if the troubled family is looked at in isolation from wider structural social issues, if the normative family is never problematized, all this means is an intensified surveillance of the troubled family by agents of the state, with its objectifying and abjecting effects. This stance is picked up and developed in the 2012 ‘Working with Troubled Families’ document (DCLG 2012b). Here, the argument is worked through for the need for a single dedicated intensive worker who knows how to navigate the system and is committed to helping the troubled family ‘turn around’. Intensive family intervention programmes are put forward as ‘best practice’. Here, I want to be clear that I am not judging whether a dedicated family worker who knows the system well and can attend to a multiplicity of problems is or isn’t effective in supporting families—this is neither my area of expertise, nor is it my focus. What I do want to note is that the argument for intensive intervention programmes is put forward without any attention to structural inequalities;

the problems and solutions are in the hands of individuals, both the savvy, committed family intervention worker and the remedial individual family who needs to be brought to realize that they need help. Whatever the intentions or effectiveness of individual intervention workers, this framing sets up a discursive site in which the infantilized family, and particularly the deficient single mother, is constructed as the object of disciplining by the parental state. That it is single mothers who are primarily targeted is confirmed by Montgomerie and Tepe-Belfrage (2016). Their study of implementation of the Troubled Families programme notes the over-representation of female-headed single parent households in the programme, with one Programme Director estimating that it could be as high as 80% (ibid.: 18). The normative family thus operates as both the model for the relationship that is established between individual and state, and as the model for what must be reinstated through state discipline.

There is some evidence that this infantilizing and disciplining narrative has carried over into the work of implementing the Troubled Families programme. In their interviews with programme workers, Montgomerie and Tepe-Belfrage (2016) cite numerous examples where we can see elements of this narrative being reproduced. Focusing on what they call ‘parental literacy’, which I would see as part of the broader narrative about remedial families, they argue that ‘interview participants routinely framed the problem in terms of the parental choices of the families deemed to be ‘troubled’ as morally wrong and, more generally, that the poor and welfare dependent don’t have an ability to evaluate the morality of their choices—that they lack the parental literacy to make such choices’ (ibid.: 19). The concern with poor reproductive choices is also echoed:

So there’ll be three different surnames of those children who are siblings, so there will be males who come and go ... there hasn’t been the accountability and fathers have come and gone as they’ve so chosen without taking on-board that responsibility. (Montgomerie and Tepe-Belfrage 2016: 20)

As is the sense of reproducing a deficient culture:

there is a culture in the poor areas to demonstrate and evidence your love for your children by buying them the latest things, so they might not have



any money at all but they get in to a couple of years' debt to buy the latest X-Box or the latest mobile phone because that's cool. (Montgomery and Tepe-Belfrage 2016: 19)

Families' resistance to intervention from the authorities is seen as further proof of their remedial status, as in the words of one programme director interviewed by the authors:

That they don't like authority; they think they'll deal with their own problems. They don't like being told what to do. They don't like being ... there's just so many problems in that particular family's life that they see a FIP worker coming in as just an additional problem. (Programme Director) (Montgomery and Tepe-Belfrage 2016: 21)

Echoing Louise Casey's justification for accessing welfare records without informed consent, discussed above, programme workers apparently don't tell families that they are considered 'troubled' when signing them up to the programme; neither is information about the criteria used to evaluate their eligibility disclosed (*ibid.*: 21). This further entrenches those deemed to be 'troubled' in the state of infantilization which justifies intensive intervention to change their behaviours.

Overall, and turning its face against much research to the contrary (see, e.g., Main and Bradshaw 2016), the troubled families narrative consistently elides poor parents and poor parenting. What is most pernicious about this, if we want to think about its gendered effects, is the ways in which the narrative produces family flux and family troubles as the preserve of the poor, together with violence, drug use and mental health issues. The targeting of the single mother as particularly complicit in producing these problems and then not being able to cope with them is one part of its gendered effect. But there is also the problem of the ideal family form against which this remedial family is being defined. Bhattacharyya has argued that austerity policy is 'agnostic' about gender and family roles (2016: 154), that the key concern is to offload and constrain the costs of social reproduction. But if we take the Social Justice/Troubled Families narrative as part of the wider austerity agenda—and I have argued in this chapter that we should—then, at least in the UK, reducing the state's role in social reproduction is still very much entangled with a particular famil-

ial ideology, one that believes in the civilizing effect of marriage on both men and women, and one in which the ‘normal’ private sphere is somehow magically protected from the unequal power relations that mark the social. This is what happens when wider structural inequalities are erased from view, as are the compounding effects of other areas of social policy, especially cuts in public services aimed at providing resources to disadvantaged families. This is also what happens when the proposed solution to the crisis evokes a fantasy of the normative family as always stable, always peaceful, one in which no one engages in socially questionable activities, or struggles with mental or physical health issues. In redefining Social Justice to target what it positions as the dysfunctional family and its individual bad behaviour, and in evoking the Troubled Family as the legitimate object of intensive surveillance and discipline, this narrative reinstates some very old assumptions about the gendered private sphere of family and reproduction, with deeply troubling effects.

Chapter 6 turns to another kind of family making trouble for the normative reproductive sphere in times of austerity: the migrant family. Here, too, we will see that anxieties about the excessive reproductive burdens of some families become the narrative starting point for a further crisis of belonging and citizenship in the age of austerity.

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# 6

## Attachment and Disgust in Narratives of UK Family Migration Policy

We all know the stories about the Human Rights Act. The violent drug dealer who cannot be sent home because his daughter – for whom he pays no maintenance – lives here. The robber who cannot be removed because he has a girlfriend. The illegal immigrant who cannot be deported because – and I am not making this up – he had a pet cat. (Theresa May, Conservative Party Conference 2011)

Because when immigration is too high, when the pace of change is too fast, it's impossible to build a cohesive society. It's difficult for schools and hospitals and core infrastructure like housing and transport to cope. And we know that for people in low-paid jobs, wages are forced down even further while some people are forced out of work altogether. [...] at best the net economic and fiscal effect of high immigration is close to zero. So there is no case, in the national interest, for immigration of the scale we have experienced over the last decade. (Theresa May, Conservative Party Conference 2015)

In this chapter, I trace a narrative arc constructed over the five years of Coalition government that tells a story about migration and reproduction, and that poses the right to a family life for migrants as a particular problem to the successful reproduction of national belonging. In this

account, we see the transnational entanglements of migrant families framed as something that needs to be both scrutinized and disavowed, since they open the door to unbearable reproductive burdens and therefore pose a threat to national integrity. My own story of this narrative begins with Theresa May's exasperated claims in 2011 about not being able to deport criminals because of their illegitimate appropriations of the right to family life. The story thus begins in a space where migrant status and criminality are already linked, and where there is outrage that such criminals would misuse something as sacred as the principle of family life to claim an attachment to this country. May's provocative, and factually incorrect, reference to the illegal immigrant and his pet cat was immediately refuted by the judicial establishment itself, as a BBC report at the time notes:

Within minutes, a spokesman for the Judicial Office at the Royal Courts of Justice, which issues statements on behalf of senior judges, said: 'This was a case in which the Home Office conceded that they had mistakenly failed to apply their own policy – applying at that time to that appellant – for dealing with unmarried partners of people settled in the UK. That was the basis for the decision to uphold the original tribunal decision – the cat had nothing to do with the decision.' (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-15171980>)

Nevertheless, May's claim chimed with—and was being regularly reproduced at the time by—an outraged tabloid press, most notably the *Daily Mail*, with headlines such as 'Human right to sponge off UK: 3,200 criminals, failed asylum seekers and benefit tourists can't be kicked out because of right to family life' (*Daily Mail* 18 June 2011). The individual migrant=criminal=sham family triad 'sticks' and becomes a starting point for our story, which then opens out to consider the broader 'public' sphere of social reproduction. Too many of these problematic transnational families trying to exercise a right to family life in problematic ways leads inexorably to the kinds of claims May is making five years later, at another Conservative Party conference, where this mass of families is demanding too many homes, too many places in schools and hospitals, and where their difference makes cohesion and integration impossible. The years between these two bookends, especially 2012–2013, are filled

in with a series of interventions in regard to family migration. Most notable among these is the introduction of new family migration rules in 2012, which included a new income threshold of £18,600 for sponsors of foreign spouses; new rules for entry of other family dependents; new guidelines for identifying ‘sham’ marriages, and for dealing with Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), regarding the right to family and private life, which will be considered in more detail later in the chapter. But these measures are also accompanied by a series of additional interventions by Government ministers about the need to tighten up migrants’ access to various aspects of the welfare state and its services necessary to social reproduction. In March 2013 alone, there was a series of statements that followed each other in quick succession. In one, we learn that Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith is:

seeking an urgent meeting with the EU to look at how the European commission was interpreting free movement of labour to interfere with member states’ welfare policies. ‘Under universal credit, we will hugely tighten up on self-employed people, shutting the door to many. We are trying to change the rules so that it can be a much tougher test about the period they [EU citizens] spend here and *the commitment they make to the UK.*’ (Wintour and Watt 2013, emphasis added)

The same article records meetings between Duncan Smith and Communities and Local Government Minister Eric Pickles to discuss how ‘to require councils to publish the number of foreigners being given access to social housing ahead of UK nationals’ (ibid.), and notes that the:

Health Secretary would be sending fresh guidance to GPs and hospitals setting out rules on when they are required to treat foreign nationals. ‘The reality has been GPs and health services overstate their responsibilities with regards to people coming in who are migrants.’ (ibid.)

A few weeks later, the Prime Minister reminds that we have a ‘free National Health Service not a free international Health Service’ (Watt 2013), while leaked emails from the Department of Education reveal that

proposals being considered by an inter-ministerial group (IMG) on migrants' access to benefits and public services include suggestions that they could consider banning illegal migrant children from schools, or at least require schools to check the immigration status of their pupils (Malik and Walker 2013). The IMG emails also introduce the terminology of 'education tourists' to join 'health tourists' in the vocabulary of disgust. A month earlier, the UK Border Agency had launched a Valentine's Day social media campaign of publically naming and shaming 'sham marriages' on Twitter with the hashtag #rosesareredvioletsareblue if your marriage is sham we'll be on to you, circulating videos and photos of 'live' sham marriage crackdowns (D'Aoust 2014: 332). And then there was the notorious 'racist van' initiative during the summer of 2013, when two vans with large posters reading 'In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest' were driven through six London boroughs while immigration spot checks were being carried out in selected underground stations, and leaflets were distributed with a number for illegal migrants to text to receive advice on how to leave the country (Batty 2013; Sparrow 2013). Together, I argue, these interventions work to produce a sense of crisis in the national reproductive sphere: illegitimate personal reproductive arrangements mass together to initiate a crisis in the public reproductive sphere, not only in terms of strains on public services, but also in terms of a presumed proper relationship between citizen and state that sets the terms for belonging to the nation. The language of attachment or, as in Duncan Smith's statement, commitment to the UK as a precondition for accessing the means of social reproduction, rather than as an outcome of a longer-term process of making a home in the space of Britain, is a further inflection of this casting of the crisis as one that is not just about the fair allocation of scarce resources in a time of austerity, but is also simultaneously about policing the borders of belonging. The demonizing of the ECHR, with its problematic 'right to family life' Article 8, and of the 1998 Human Rights Act which enshrines that Convention in UK Law, adds a further inflection to the narrative. Attacks on Human Rights legislation in the context of migration feed into a dehumanizing process that works to undercut appeals to basic human empathy with the situation of migrants and refugees, as seen most recently in the post-Coalition Conservative government's approach to the



2015–2016 refugee crisis in Europe, and which is reflected in May's 2015 conference speech. The demonizing of human rights and migrants' attachment to claims to human rights, as seen in the debates over family migration, open a rhetorical space for dehumanizing those who make these claims illegitimately, and invite us, give us permission, to see the migrant as not fully human. This is a particularly affect-laden narrative, in which appeals to the primordial sense of family belonging bleed out into an equally naturalized sense of national belonging to evoke disgust and disavowal of those who do not belong, who make illegitimate claims to belong and who thereby threaten the security of those who do properly belong to the national family.

The proposed resolution of this crisis can be seen in its broad outlines in Theresa May's ministerial foreword to the 2011 Consultation Document introducing the Coalition's proposed changes to family migration rules:

Families are the bedrock of society. Family migration must be based on a real and continuing relationship, not a marriage of convenience or a marriage that is forced or is a sham. It is obvious that British citizens and those settled here should be able to marry or enter into a civil partnership with whomever they choose. But if they want to establish their family life in the UK, rather than overseas, then their spouse or partner must have a genuine attachment to the UK, be able to speak English, and integrate into our society, and they must not be a burden on the taxpayer. Families should be able to manage their own lives. If a British citizen or a person settled here cannot support their foreign spouse or partner, then they cannot expect the taxpayer to do it for them. (Home Office 2011)

Here, May begins with an assertion about the social importance of family life, a familiar stance for a conservative politician. But, quickly, this celebration of family life turns into something different, an assertion of the powers of the state to determine which kinds of family life are to be defended and which are to be policed and scrutinized. It is because the family is so important to social stability that it is necessary to reinstate the normative, and increasingly neo-liberal, family as the bedrock of society; therefore the migrant family must be managed and if necessary excluded in three interrelated ways. First, the state needs to crack down on 'sham'

marriages and families, and needs to strengthen its power to define what constitutes the real marriage/family; second, foreign partners need to be able to demonstrate a genuine attachment to the UK and to integrate into its norms, *before* being allowed to enter or remain in the country—they need to be willing to marry the nation and not just an individual citizen, forsaking transnational attachments; and, third, tying family migration policy into the austerity agenda examined throughout this book, the proper family is one that is not a burden on the taxpayer, who is presumed to be not a migrant and to be a good neo-liberal citizen who should be able to manage their own life.

In the following sections, I take these three narrative strands in reverse order and look at how they are developed in the policy documentation surrounding the introduction of these new family migration rules. My primary focus is on the July 2011 Consultation Document *Securing our Border, Controlling Migration, Family Migration* (Home Office 2011), which provides the fullest narrative account of the thinking behind the policy, but I also draw selectively on the June 2012 *Statement of Intent*, laying out the changes that were to be implemented, and the Home Office *Policy Equality Statement, Family Migration*, also produced in 2012.

## **‘Families should be able to manage their own lives’**

The headline change to the 2012 family migration rules was the introduction of the £18,600 minimum income threshold for sponsoring a spouse who was not from the European Economic Area (non-EEA), with additional income requirements for sponsoring non-EEA dependent children. This policy change was, and remains, the primary focus of protest and campaigning by organizations such as the Migrants Rights Network and the BritCits group, with their Divided Families campaign, and was also the focus of an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) Inquiry in June 2013. Both campaigning and academic interventions have argued that the new minimum income threshold discriminates disproportionately on grounds of class, gender, race and ethnicity, as well as disability, age and region (see Sirriyeh 2015; Home Office 2012a: 5–6)

because of the ways in which this ignores prevailing income inequalities along those lines. None of this was denied by the government, which in its Equality Statement accompanying the new rules, acknowledged that about 45% of the then current applicants would not qualify under the new rule, but at the same time argued that this indirect discrimination could be justified:

Overall, a large number of potential sponsors will not meet the income threshold, meaning that they will be prevented from sponsoring the settlement in the UK of a non-EEA partner. The MAC [Migration Advisory Committee] estimated that an income threshold of £18,600 will not be met by 45% of current applicants. If this number of applicants were affected this is proportionate to meeting the policy aims of reducing burdens on the taxpayer and promoting integration. (Home Office 2012b: 10)

*We consider that any indirect discrimination against those with protected characteristics who may be represented in greater proportions in lower paid groups is justified by and proportionate to the policy aim of safeguarding the economic well-being of the UK by reducing burdens on the taxpayer and promoting integration. It is in the UK's economic interests for those sponsoring the settlement in the UK of a non-EEA partner to be able to stand on their own two feet financially: not increasing the burden on the taxpayer in terms of income-related benefits, e.g. housing benefit, through the presence here of the migrant partner, and ensuring that the latter is well enough supported to be able to participate and integrate in British society. Financial self-sufficiency should be demonstrated irrespective of protected characteristics. ( Home Office 2012b: 11, emphasis added)*

Clearly, the higher income threshold is motivated by a political desire to reduce net migration, and to only 'let the right ones in'; that is, those who will not be 'a burden on the taxpayer'. The fact that sponsors might also be taxpayers and that migrants, once allowed to work, will also be potential taxpayers is glossed over to set up a binary relationship in which the (non-sponsor, non-migrant) taxpayer stands in for the national economic interest which is threatened by the arrival of these transnational burdens. But, additionally, what this account does is to reassert the traditional and highly gendered division between public and private spheres.

The good family ‘stands on its own two feet’, resolves its problems and needs by itself, and stays neatly in the private sphere. So, this is as much an ideological as an economic argument, that ties the too-poor migrant family to the benefit scrounger and the troubled family explored in other chapters—these are families who have failed in the neo-liberal project of self-managed actualization, and their numbers need to be limited. The fact that social factors of gendered, raced, classed and other inequalities—here, importantly, individualized as the ‘protected characteristics’ of an equality review process—make it more difficult for some families or family members to ‘stand on their own two feet’, meaning that they require some support from the public, social reproductive sphere, is refused, with all its gendered, racialized and classed consequences. The failure to achieve financial self-sufficiency is thus rendered as an individual or family failure, a failure of the private sphere, and the broader, structural and social inequalities are hidden from view.

The delineation of the migrant family as neo-liberal failure is clearly expressed in the Equality Statement:

The family route has been a very easy way into the UK. The current maintenance requirement in practice means that any sponsor earning, after tax and housing costs have been deducted, more than the equivalent of Income Support for a couple (around £5,500 a year) is deemed to have sufficient funds to sponsor a spouse or partner. *This is inadequate to prevent migrants and sponsors becoming a burden on the welfare system and in turn inhibits proper integration. Chain migration is a routine feature of some communities which remain insular. There is also widespread concern about non-genuine relationships, including sham marriages and forced marriages. We need greater selectivity, so that family migration to the UK is right for migrants, communities and the country.* (Home Office 2012b: 3, emphasis added)

The problem of a failure to integrate will be explored more fully in the next section and in Chap. 7: here, we can note that this twinned claim—of being a burden on the welfare system (or the taxpayer) and the failure to integrate—is repeatedly evoked across all the family migration policy documentation. Precisely why income and integration are so intimately and inexorably linked is never explained. Indeed, a counter-argument

could well be made—it is the well-off who can hide in gated communities and exclusive neighbourhoods, with much less need to integrate into the daily life of UK society. Nevertheless, the repetition of this sequence here and elsewhere works strongly to suggest a cause and effect relationship. It has been too easy for too many poor people to enter the country via the family route. These people, too poor to integrate properly, then bring more of their kind in, who continue to fail to integrate. Sham and forced marriages then follow.

While rendering family independence from the state as an absolute good—in the national interest—the policy also further intensifies relations of dependence inside the family and this, too, has gendered consequences. Limiting the acceptable sources of income to meet the £18,600 threshold by excluding past or potential earnings of the foreign spouse or partner both materially and discursively reinforces the position of the migrant partner—who is, in the great majority of cases, a woman—as dependent. The spouse's capacity to contribute financially to the family is thus cast as materially irrelevant to proving their suitability to enter the UK; discursively, the migrant spouse is defined as dependent on the resources of the sponsoring partner.

Indeed, as Wray (2009: 601) and others have argued, family migration has long been seen as inherently problematic to the state because it undermines the state's power to select the 'best' migrants—it can impose income thresholds, but not tests of skills or economic activity. More broadly, as well, as Bridget Anderson argues, the notion of 'family life' itself is a problem for immigration policy, in that 'all family members are cast as "dependent"'. In contrast to the independence and self-sufficiency of the worker, dependence is perceived as a fundamental characteristic of family life' (Anderson 2013: 62). The problem here is that 'dependence' is always seen a threat for the neo-liberal model of citizenship. Rather than acknowledging and valuing the interdependence that characterizes the work of social reproduction, it is something that needs to be firmly relegated to the private sphere and managed there. This is also a preoccupation of the new rules regarding migration of elderly dependent family members. Here, the state gives itself the power to determine what constitutes genuine dependency and to impose limits on the degree of

caring to be allowed within its borders. As the Consultation Document puts it:

We need to look carefully at what this means in practice, in particular at whether the relative aged 65 or over is necessarily ‘dependent’ on the UK-based sponsor and whether there are other ways of them being supported short of settling in the UK, for example by being sent money by their relative in the UK. (Home Office 2011: 52)

The Equality Statement, responding to concerns that the new rules might constitute discrimination on grounds of age, further elaborates:

We are ending the routine expectation of settlement in the UK for parents and grandparents aged 65 or over who are financially dependent on a relative here. Non-EEA adult dependent relatives will only be able to settle in the UK if they can demonstrate that, as a result of age, illness or disability, they require a level of long-term personal care that can only be provided in the UK by their relative here and without recourse to public funds. [...] the policy seeks to ensure that *only those who have a genuine need to be physically close to and cared for by a close relative* in the UK are able to settle here. Those who do not have such care needs can be supported financially in the country in which they live by their relative in the UK. (2012b: 23, emphasis added)

The Statement of Intent then sets out a detailed list of requirements that need to be demonstrated in order to prove the genuineness of the relationship, the degree of care needs, the absolute inability for those care needs to be met abroad, and the guarantee that those care needs will not require recourse to public funds (Home Office 2012c: 29–30). By significantly tightening up the rules on how absolutely dependent on face-to-face care older family members need to be in order to justify being here, the family migration documents make it quite clear that the government would prefer for those settled in the UK to care for their elderly dependents at a distance, adding another dimension to the already complex global care chains through which this aspect of reproductive work is now undertaken (Hochschild 2000; Williams 2011).

The third element of this aspect of family migration policy is the extension of the probation period between entry and settlement for migrant spouses and partners from two to five years. This further reinforces the positioning of the migrant partner as, quite literally, on probation, dependent on passing a number of 'tests' to prove their eligibility for neo-liberal citizenship. As the Consultation Document puts it:

We therefore propose extending the probationary period before spouses and partners can apply for settlement from the current 2 years to 5 years, to test the genuineness of the relationship before permanent residence in the UK is granted on the basis of it, to encourage the integration of the spouse or partner into British life before reaching settlement, and to reduce burdens on the taxpayer *by postponing access to benefits for which no tax or National Insurance contribution has been made* by 3 years. Access to the labour market, to the NHS (including maternity services) and to schooling will be unaffected by this change. Family migrants in work will continue to have access to contributory benefits (for example contribution-based job-seeker's allowance, statutory maternity pay, maternity allowance and widow's benefit) once they have made at least 2 years' National Insurance contributions, and the entitlement of the spouse or partner who is a British citizen or is settled here to child benefit and child tax credit will be unaffected. (Home Office [2011](#): 26)

Despite some exceptions being granted in cases where domestic violence or forced marriage can be proved, or in cases of bereavement, or involving spouses of members of the armed forces, extending the probation period is defended as addressing all three aspects of the government's solution to the reproductive crisis it has identified: the genuineness of the relationship remains under scrutiny for longer, the migrant spouse is barred from non-contributory benefits for a further three years while their capacity to contribute and not be a burden, to be a neoliberal citizen in their own right, is also under scrutiny, and their attachment to the country is also to be proven. The Consultation Document also notes that, since about 10% of marriages end in divorce within five years, as compared to only 3% after two years, this may result in a reduction of successful family migration cases, and that it may mean that 'fewer marriages

of convenience will be entered into in the first place if the probationary period for the family route is in line with other routes' (Home Office 2011: 26–27). In the next section, we see how this extended scrutiny of the migrant family is bound up with not only proving one's independence from state support, but also proving one's pre-existing attachment to the UK.

### **'... a genuine attachment to the UK'**

As part of the consultations on changes to the family migration rules, the government asked whether they should introduce what it called 'an attachment requirement', along the lines introduced by the Danish government, in which applicants to the family migration route are asked to demonstrate that 'the combined attachment to Denmark of both parties to a visa or leave to remain application based on marriage must be greater than their combined attachment to any other country' (Home Office 2011: 18). The indicators devised to test this combined attachment include such things as how long both have lived in Denmark, whether they have studied there or have strong ties to the Danish labour market, whether they have children or other family members in another country, and the extent of their ties to another country, including whether they have made extended visits to that country (*ibid.*). Two things are significant about this discussion: first, its narrative framing in the Consultation Document. The reference to the 'attachment requirement' follows on immediately from a discussion of the question 'Should we seek to define more clearly what constitutes a genuine and continuing relationship, marriage or partnership, for the purposes of the Immigration Rules?' (*ibid.*) and is introduced with the following statement: 'We could consider additional measures to test the genuineness of the relationship, marriage or partnership, and promote the effective integration of family migrants to the UK.' What does this way of framing the discussion do? In tying the genuineness of a (personal, family) relationship to an attachment to the country, it is suggesting that those who cannot satisfactorily demonstrate an already established commitment to the nation may not be genuinely attached to the marriage, partnership or relationship either. Rhetorically, this reverses the more conventional cause and effect



relationship reflected in May's statement that 'family is the bedrock of society' to suggest that a commitment to a particular 'society' must be the bedrock of an acceptable 'family'. We could say that, here, government rhetoric reveals what it usually works so hard to conceal when evoking the family, that the family together with the whole 'private' sphere is not a natural and universal given, a starting point; rather, it is a culturally and socially specific construct, and a key object and effect of particular power relations and contestations. The specific context of immigration ('a genuine relationship for the purposes of Immigration Rules'), where the state has increased powers to decide what kinds of families will be allowed to form in the space of the nation, offers a privileged site in which to see the public production of the private sphere at work.

The second point that is significant about the discussion is the story about attachment itself that begins to emerge. Evidence of connection to any other country is seen as necessarily preventing attachment to the receiving country, setting up an either/or binary which most migrants would find impossible to inhabit, and which would seem to fly in the face of the transnational connections that define much of contemporary life for migrant and non-migrant alike. Indeed, the private sphere being crafted in this policy narrative is one in which the transnational must be disavowed, as it is always a sign of potential danger. Further, the narrative demands that migrants demonstrate a prior and over-riding attachment *in order* to be able to integrate. How one is expected to have secured that attachment in a discursive context of hostility and suspicion, in which you are cast as an always-already burden on the taxpayer and threat to the social reproductive sphere, is not really considered; neither is the sense that 'attachment' might more productively be considered as an outcome of a long-term process of making a home in the space of the nation, rather than its precondition.

Ultimately, the government decided not to include an attachment test, but this preoccupation with, and particular conceptualization of, attachment remains through other means. It's there in the determination—to not really justified on the basis of numbers of cases—to root out criminals using Article 8 of the ECHR to make illegitimate claims to stay in a country they have shown such contempt for by breaking its laws (Theresa May's exasperation with the cat). It also emerges in the rationale for the decision to remove immediate leave to remain for those who may have

demonstrated their attachment to a British citizen by establishing family life elsewhere, but have not yet demonstrated their attachment to the UK by integrating here. This is, in part, a reflection of the normative neo-liberal citizen requirement of paying in before accessing any entitlements, but it is not only this economic argument at work, I think. There is also a sense that one must prove a more emotional patriotic attachment to the nation—through integrating into British norms and values, through some sort of participation in national life—that needs to be proven before leave to remain can be awarded. Here, a genuine and persisting relationship to an individual citizen is not enough; one has to show that one has married the nation as well. While the numbers affected by this do not appear to be large, it tells us something about what an attachment to the nation is to mean:

In 2010, 2,100 people were issued with a visa allowing immediate settlement upon entry to the UK (known as indefinite leave to enter) on the basis of a marriage or partnership that had been in existence for at least 4 years. Indefinite leave to enter gives spouses and partners full and immediate access to the benefits system, potentially without ever having contributed towards its cost or having ever been to the UK before.

We believe that migrants should achieve settlement in the UK and the benefits that come with it, by participating and integrating in British society, and demonstrating their attachment to the UK, over time. We therefore propose to end indefinite leave to enter for spouses and partners who have been married or in a relationship for at least 4 years before entering the UK, and require them to complete a 5-year probationary period before they can apply for settlement.

Ending indefinite leave to enter will bring greater fairness by generally requiring all couples wishing to set up home in the UK to meet the same requirements at each stage of the process: to enter, remain in or settle in the UK on the basis of their relationship. (Home Office 2011: 27)

Here, the test of a genuine relationship has been passed, but it is still 'not fair' that this alone should secure settlement status. As in Iain Duncan Smith's demand that EU citizens display their commitment to the UK before accessing benefits, it is seen here that 'It is not fair that some migrant partners, who may never have been to the UK before or made any tax or National Insurance contribution, should get immediate

settlement and full access to the welfare system' (Home Office 2012c: 6). While the rules include tougher thresholds for English language requirements and passing the Life in the UK test, which are not insignificant hurdles for some migrant spouses, the substantive content of what demonstrates an attachment to the UK is never fleshed out. The only thing specifically mentioned is paying for, and delaying access to, the benefits system. As in the case of the income threshold, then, what seems to be key to demonstrating one's attachment to the country is not to ask for any forms of social support. However, by framing this separation of the migrant family from social support as evidence of attachment to the UK, the narrative makes broader claims about the proper relationship between all families, the state and the nation. The preoccupation here is not only to limit the numbers of migrants potentially making claims on the social reproductive activities of the state—although it is about that. The story about migrant families ties in to the broader austerity narrative we have seen emerging in previous chapters, which identifies the realms of both individual and social reproduction, with their demands for recognizing the interdependency and vulnerabilities of human life, as particularly problematic. The figure of the family migrant thus joins the state-dependent scrounger, the disabled person on benefits and the troubled family as another abjected figure whose excessive reproductive demands cannot be contained within the narrative logic of austerity. What the migrant family adds to this narrative logic is a preoccupation with the reproductive burdens its transnational entanglements represent, and an insistence that the national austerity project requires a disavowal of these entanglements.

### **'Family migration must be based on a real and continuing relationship, not a marriage of convenience or a marriage that is forced or is a sham'**

Underpinning and inflecting these two narrative strands is the persistent preoccupation within these documents with the illegitimate or sham family. Many words are devoted across these policy documents to two

allegedly pressing problems—the criminal who uses Article 8 of the ECHR illegitimately to claim the right to a family life in the UK, and the sham marriage or marriage of convenience. I say ‘alleged’ because, in terms of numbers, the policy documents are nowhere able to quantify these as significant threats to the integrity of the UK’s immigration system. But, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, these two figures are exemplary for eliciting outrage and disgust, affects that can then spread out to the whole migrant population and that can help to construct a sense of crisis in the immigration system that must be taken in hand. These are the two areas where the policy narrative most effectively creates the problem it claims to address.

Both the Consultation Document and the Statement of Intent use the same terms to describe the need ‘to find an objective way of identifying whether a relationship is genuine and continuing or not’ (Home Office 2011: 7). The appeal to objectivity sets up the government both as a neutral arbiter and as a knowing expert, who can cut through the obfuscation to ‘define more clearly what constitutes a genuine and continuing relationship, marriage or partnership for the purposes of the Immigration Rules’ (ibid.). It instates in government the public power to define the private world of intimate interpersonal relationships, to legislate ‘objectively’ on this most subjective of human activities. The appeal to objectivity also produces a universal knower, the view from above that claims to speak for all, through its capacity to strip away the particularity of subjective ways of knowing, and, in relation to migration, this also means stripping away the cultural particularities of specific interpersonal relationships to identify what must be present across cultural differences to signify a relationship as genuine.

Some of the indicators devised to determine the genuineness of a relationship might be considered unproblematic, insofar as they simply restate the authority of the state to legislate in order to prevent marriage solely for the purposes of immigration, so there is the fairly standard proviso that ‘the relationship, marriage or partnership was not entered into solely for the purpose of obtaining an advantage under the Immigration Rules or EEA Regulations’ (Home Office 2011: 17). But other value judgements and normativities are also at work. One of the first problems with the discussion of ‘objective’ indicators is the ways in which ‘sham’,

forced and arranged marriages are dealt with together, something that many of the civil society organizations involved in the consultation objected to and advised against. Many of these organizations argued that 'sham' and forced marriage should not be linked; while the former might be considered a legitimate focus of immigration policy, the latter was a distinct problem in its own right, that might have an immigration element, but should more productively be dealt with as a question of gendered, civil or human rights (Home Office 2012a: 17–18; 24–25). Nevertheless, the linking of the two found in the Consultation Document is reproduced in the 2012 Statement of Intent, as in this elaboration of 'factors which may be associated with a non-genuine relationship':

- If the marriage or civil partnership took place in the UK, a report – of a suspected sham marriage or civil partnership – was made by the registration service under section 24 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.
- The applicant or sponsor makes a public statement that their marriage is a sham. An application can be refused on the basis of such a public statement alone.
- The applicant or sponsor makes a public statement (not in confidence) that they have been forced into marriage. An application can be refused on the basis of such a public statement alone.
- A sibling of the sponsor or applicant has been forced into marriage.
- The applicant, sponsor or a family member of either is or has been the subject or respondent of a forced marriage protection order under the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 1997 or the Forced Marriage etc. (Protection and Jurisdiction) (Scotland) Act 1999. An application can be refused on the basis alone of a current order involving the applicant or sponsor.
- There is information from a reliable third party (e.g. the Forced Marriage Unit, police, social services, registration service or a minister of religion) which indicates that the marriage is or may be a sham marriage or a forced marriage. (It may not be possible for this information to be used in any refusal notice). The fact that a third party indicates that in their opinion a marriage, partnership or relationship is genuine must not be afforded any weight.
- The applicant or sponsor does not appear to have the capacity to consent to the marriage, partnership or relationship, e.g. owing to learning

difficulties, and independent evidence, e.g. from a social services assessment, has not been provided to confirm that such capacity exists.

- There is evidence of unreasonable restrictions being placed on the applicant or sponsor, e.g. being kept at home by their family, being subject to unreasonable financial restrictions, attempts to prevent the police or other agencies having reasonable, unrestricted access to the applicant or sponsor. (Home Office 2012c: 23)

Here, evidence of a sham marriage slips seamlessly into evidence of forced marriage, inviting the reader to associate the qualities attached to the forced marriage—in particular, the normative disapproval of its gendered and ableist coercions—with the sham marriage as well. The social consensus that forced marriage is a social problem that it is right for the state to combat is mobilized in order to see sham marriage as a similar social concern.

More subtle, but also perhaps more insidious, are the ways in which arranged marriage is inserted into this narrative. The concern to intervene and manage arranged marriage in the context of migration has long been part of immigration policy in the UK, and is another of the New Labour amenabilities I have been tracking throughout this book. It was a focus of concern during policy discussions around the 2002 Immigration and Asylum Act, as well as the public debate around community cohesion under New Labour (Sirriyeh 2015: 236; see also Gedalof 2007, 2012). Here, the dominant narrative makes certain concessions to anti-racism—or, perhaps more accurately, to the remaining effects of a multiculturalist discourse—in that arranged marriage cannot be disavowed outright, or straightforwardly equated with sham or forced marriages. But it remains a phenomenon that needs to be accounted for in the policy narrative, and the contours of its legitimacy need to be spelled out in ways that other forms of marriage don't require. Repeatedly, it is referenced as having to be taken into account because of its special circumstances, as something that remains outside the norm and therefore as an abiding potential danger point for the introduction of sham or forced marriage, as in the following passages from the Consultation Document:

Possible factors or criteria which could highlight cases which require further scrutiny, and which could be taken into consideration in assessing

whether a relationship, marriage or partnership is genuine and continuing could include: [...]

- The couple are able to provide accurate personal details about each other, and to provide consistent evidence, and have a shared understanding, of the core facts of their relationship, for example how they met for the first time. *Account will need to be taken of the circumstances which may apply where the marriage is an arranged marriage.*
- The couple are able to communicate with each other in a language understood by them both.
- The couple, or their families acting on their behalf, have had a discussion or made definite plans concerning the practicalities of the couple living together in the UK. *In the case of an arranged marriage, the couple agree with the plans made by their families.*

We could also include:

- The couple have been in a relationship for a minimum of 12 months prior to the marriage visa or leave to remain application, and must be able to evidence regular contact during those 12 months. *Where the couple cannot meet this criterion, for example because theirs is or will be an arranged marriage and they have not yet been together as a couple for that period, we could grant 12 months' initial temporary leave to enable them to meet this criterion, and ask them to apply for further leave after 12 months. This would enable a further assessment to be made at that point of whether theirs is a genuine and continuing relationship. (Home Office 2011: 17, emphasis added)*

In the Statement of Intent, we find the following instruction:

Entry clearance officers and other caseworkers will be required to remain alert and sensitive to the extent to which religious and cultural practices may shape the factors present or absent in a particular case, particularly at the entry clearance/leave to remain stage. For example, couples in arranged marriages may have spent little if any time together prior to the marriage. For many faiths and cultures marriage marks the start of a commitment to a lifelong partnership and not the affirmation of a pre-existing settled partnership. In some cultures it is traditional for household

accounts, bills, etc. to be in the name of the male head of the household (who could be the male partner or perhaps their father or grandfather). (Home Office 2012c: 22)

These provisos constitute the arranged marriage as a problem at the same time that they articulate it as a problem that needs to be tolerated. That arranged marriage remains outside the norm is reinforced as the documents move on to expand on the indicators delineating both genuine and sham marriages. For example, indicators of a genuine marriage, marking it off immediately from the last statement above, include that '[t]he couple share financial responsibilities, e.g. a joint mortgage/tenancy agreement, a joint bank account and/or joint savings, utility bills in both their names' (Home Office 2012c: 24). When these two statements are considered together, the male-headed household is consigned to 'some cultures' while the unmarked couple of a genuine marriage share financial responsibilities and authority.

A number of other indicators reveal a further slide into a narrow normativity about what constitutes an 'objectively' genuine relationship. These include:

The sponsor and/or applicant have visited the other's home country and family and are able to provide evidence of this. (Home Office 2012c: 24)

Factors that may prompt further scrutiny include:

Whether the wedding ceremony or reception prompts the need for further enquiries. For example, if there were very few or no guests, whether those in attendance were significant family members of both parties or complete strangers, and whether the couple eloped. We would generally look at all the circumstances of the event. (Home Office 2011: 23)

And whether:

There is a lack of appropriate contribution to the responsibilities of the marriage, partnership or relationship, e.g. a lack of shared financial or other domestic responsibilities. (Home Office 2012c: 25)



Here, all kinds of classed, gendered and culturally specific normativities slip into the account. Assumptions that some kind of gendered equality in relation to financial and domestic responsibilities mark that the British norm is taken as read and this feeds into the wider discourse that pits an assumed gender equality for the white British majority against a racialized or ethnicized other. Cultural- and class-specific assumptions about what a genuine wedding looks like, or about how couples relate to their families and home countries, are also presented as objective indicators of a universal authenticity.

Together with the elaboration of these indicators is a series of proposals to make the determination process of the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) more stringent and wide-ranging. There are proposals to require couples to demonstrate that they have been in a genuine relationship for at least one year prior to the marriage visa or leave to remain application, and, where they cannot, to be granted an initial one-year temporary leave after which a further assessment would be made to determine if the relationship is 'genuine and continuing' (Home Office 2011: 40). There are proposals to restrict in-country switching into the family route from short-term visas as a means of deterring sham marriages, and suggested requirements for 'targeted interviewing' of applicants and 'targeted use of home visits to test whether the marriage remains in being before settlement in the UK is granted on the basis of it' (ibid.). All of these work to ramp up the culture of suspicion facing applicants to the marriage route.

A further concern with the narrative development of the problem of sham marriages is the ways in which it contributes to the process of moving the borders inside the space of the nation-state, and of reproducing the 'Border Spectacle' internally—as De Genova puts it 'As the border is effectively everywhere, so also is the spectacle of its enforcement and therefore its violation, rendering migrant "illegality" ever more unsettlingly ubiquitous' (De Genova 2013: 1183). The campaign against sham marriages and the measures proposed in these documents heighten the sense that immigration poses a threat, not only to the integrity of external borders, but also within the everyday spaces of the local. This is particularly developed in the discussion in the Consultation Document, where a

significant series of new practices involving local government, community organizations and others are floated as possible interventions in the campaign to combat sham marriage. These include:

- Proposing to ask local authorities in England to report to the UK Border Agency suspicions a couple are not residing together where they make a home visit to provide a housing certificate in support of a leave to remain application (Home Office 2011: 24);
- Discussing with local authorities and registration officers the feasibility of combining some of the role and functions of the registrar and the UK Border Agency. This involves exploring the scope to 'provide for a designated category of officer in England and Wales who is able to carry out both functions in the specific environment of a register office. Such staff could be targeted at suspected hotspots for sham marriages and to individual cases where intelligence indicated links to other significant criminality' (ibid.: 34);
- Discussions between the UKBA and the General Register Office regarding 'the feasibility of requiring, on a targeted basis, some couples which include a foreign national marrying in England and Wales to attend an interview with the UK Border Agency, in the current statutory 15-day period between giving notice of their intention to marry and being granted authority to so' (ibid.: 34);
- Because the above 15-day period may be too short to reach a decision on the genuineness of a marriage, a further possibility raised is to introduce powers to delay a marriage from taking place while further investigation occurs. Here again, registrars would be called upon to act for, and with the agreement of the Border Agency (ibid.). As part of this proposal, there is a call to 'explore the case for legislating to make "sham" a lawful impediment to marriage in England and Wales' (ibid.) alongside other lawful impediments such as bigamy, underage and prohibited blood relationship. 'Proven sham' would then become a criteria for voiding or cancelling a marriage. Here again, registration officials would be expected to assist UKBA investigations, retain documents for UKBA officials and share information (ibid.: 37);
- Proposing a new category of 'highly trusted registrar status' for local authorities, with additional scope for revenue-raising and other benefits, where 'high standards of practice in helping to counter sham marriages' are met (ibid.: 38). Sham marriages are here linked with housing

benefit and council tax fraud, and the illegal sub-letting of council housing, and would give councils a 'greater stake in the good administration of the marriage process and countering sham marriage' (ibid.). Councils that meet this standard would be offered 'greater flexibility and revenue raising powers' (ibid.);

- Considering whether applications for leave to remain based on marriage should need to be counter-signed by a solicitor or an immigration adviser (ibid.: 39);
- Considering whether local authority registrars should be able to offer a charged checking service for leave to remain applications based on marriage, as part of a process of having local authorities become 'more directly involved in immigration matters' (ibid.: 40);
- Considering whether community groups and charities might play a role in sponsoring applications for leave to remain based on marriage, adding testimony in support of applications regarding the genuineness of the relationship and the likelihood of the couple living together permanently (ibid.: 40). Here, the document adds the proviso that 'We would need to guard against the risk that, in some circumstances, such testimony could give weight to an application based on forced marriage' (ibid.).

I detail these at length to give a flavour of the cumulative effect they produce in terms of multiplying the scale and extent of new forms of surveillance and policing activities inside the borders of the nation. Were all these proposed measures to be implemented, local authorities would be financially incentivized to act as agents of the border authority, and would see their role in immigration matters substantially increased. The linking of sham marriages with housing benefit fraud and access to council housing further exacerbates the sense that marriage and family migration are danger points to the social reproductive sphere. But it not only the local arm of the state that is pressed into service here. Solicitors, charities and community groups could also be drawn into the process, being called on to vouch for the genuineness of relationships, although the latter are also to be simultaneously scrutinized, suggesting that some 'communities' might use their organizations to legitimate forced marriages. The proposed resolution to the crisis of family migration thus involves a much wider mobilization of state and non-state actors in policing the

borders of the nation, while also policing at least some of those actors in the ways they take up these tasks—local authorities would be scrutinized and evaluated in terms of their ‘highly trusted status’ as agents of the UKBA, and community groups could be similarly policed for their commitment to upholding genuine relationships within the terms set down by the government. As these ‘bordering practices’ (Bhattacharyya 2015: 120–121) intensify and implicate increasing numbers of social institutions and actors, they ‘reach into the heart of political space’ (Anderson 2013: 2) and infect it with the imperative for both migrants and citizens endlessly to prove themselves as worthy of belonging (ibid.: 6). Family migration policy thus also sits within the austerity rationality of the rationing of entitlement (Bhattacharyya 2015). The cumulative effect of all these proposed measures is to serve notice to both migrant and citizen that their entitlement to belong is always under probation.

The final element in this narrative is the problem created for family migration policy by the Human Rights framework that so exasperates Theresa May in the opening quotation to this chapter. We thus come full circle back to the beginning. Here, two strands intertwine to justify the government stance. The first is the preoccupation with criminality and the use of Article 8 of the ECHR by criminals to prevent their deportation from the UK. The Consultation Document itself acknowledges that there is already in law a ‘deportation threshold’ for crimes of a certain level, and many of the responses to the Consultation Document argue that both British and European law already acknowledge the limits of the right to family life in the case of convicted criminals (Home Office 2012a: 17–20). Nevertheless, the Consultation Document argues for the need for a broader public discussion on ‘the balance to be struck between the individual’s right to respect for private and family life and the wider public interest in protecting the public and controlling immigration’ (Home Office 2011: 61). It is this desire to keep the issue in the public eye that is significant to the overall narrative, I think. In practical policy terms, this opens a space to widen the ‘deportation threshold’, to add more illegitimate families to the list of those who should not be allowed to live as families in Britain. This includes convicted criminals whose sentence falls below the current automatic threshold but whose actions have caused ‘significant harm to

individuals, families and communities' (ibid.: 62). But it also includes those whose only offence is in relation to current Immigration law. As the Consultation Document puts it 'We do not think that a person who establishes a private or family life while they are in the UK illegally, or while their immigration status here is precarious, should *benefit from their lack of status*' (ibid., emphasis added). Although the Consultation Document goes on to acknowledge that the ECHR has already agreed that 'private or family life established whilst a person does not have lawful status is to be given less weight than private or family life established while a person is in the UK lawfully' (ibid.: 63) —that is, Human Rights law already provides for such situations—the Consultation Document insists that there is still a need for further public discussion and clarity. It seems to me that the preoccupation with sustaining the sense of crisis in relation to the human right to a family life is serving other purposes than those related to the practicalities of policy and law. It is, rather, about solidifying in the public perception the sense that claims to this human right are inextricably entangled with criminality, and that these claims are therefore indelibly tainted. They are about seeking advantage, rather than a right—about 'benefiting from a lack of status'. Once again, then, they are about making excessive demands on a state that ought to be more austere in its provisions for its subjects, who, in turn, ought to be managing on their own.

This brings us to the second strand of the account of limits on the right to a family life, which is the assertion that recognizing the right to family does not necessarily mean that that family life has to be made in Britain. As the Consultation Document argues:

where a couple have formed a union in circumstances in which one of them has not established their entitlement to be in the UK, they may be expected to make a choice as to whether they should separate, or remain together outside the UK (temporarily or permanently), regardless of how difficult that choice might be. We feel that this accords the appropriate weight to our objective of maintaining a system of immigration control which is fair as between individuals, and which lessens the possibility of illegal migrants and those whose immigration status here is precarious taking advantage of their position to secure an entitlement to remain in the UK. (Home Office 2011: 63)

This kind of government stance is not new. As Anderson notes (2013: 61), this strand has long been part of UK immigration policy discourse, going back to Enoch Powell's 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech, in which he noted that there were 'two directions in which families can be reunited'. Neither is it something that is prevented by Human Rights law, as the Consultation Document acknowledges in its discussion of rulings on the matter at the Strasbourg court (Home Office 2011: 61–62). As Anderson argues, this follows the logic, also used in relation to asylum law, that liberal states can acknowledge a right without this meaning they are obliged to allow it to be exercised on their own territory (Anderson 2013: 62). Nevertheless, when combined with the other elements of the story being told about family migration in the context of austerity, it strengthens the sense that the migrant family represents a reproductive burden that is too great for the country to bear.

Drawing these multiple strands of the family migration narrative together shows us how migration has been stitched into the wider story being told about austerity. The crisis of the excessive demands of the reproductive that we saw emerging in relation to social welfare, disability and the troubled family is, here, heightened by further incursions from the transnational family. The austerity 'rationality of rationing entitlement' (Bhattacharyya 2015) is further extended by casting the transnational family as always potentially suspect because of its possible links to criminality, sham and forced marriages. The sense of entitlement is also undercut by de-legitimizing the concept of human rights—here, indelibly compromised by its association with claims for entitlement by the undeserving outsider. The ideal neo-liberal citizen who displays loyalty to the nation by making no claims on the state for social support is further legitimated by contrast to the unreasonable demands for reproductive support from outsiders whose attachments to the nation have always to be proven. While claiming to shrink an over-generous state by retracting its role in social reproduction, that state's role in scrutinizing and disciplining its remedial subjects which we saw emerging in previous chapters is, here, enhanced by the bordering practices that are to extend deep inside the space of the nation, enlisting new state and non-state actors in the cause. Together, these strands weave a vision of austere belonging that

requires the refusal of both the reproductive and the transnational. This is a vision that is both narrowly inward-looking and also impossible to realize. If we think about what produces a sense of belonging to somewhere, the practices of social reproduction—of caring for each other and recognizing our mutual interdependence—must play a crucial role. If we think about the work of social reproduction that goes on in a country such as the UK, especially in relation to health and social care, then we have to recognize that this work could not go on without migrant labour. Nevertheless, the narrative I have drawn out here insists on seeing both the reproductive and the transnational as the source of a crisis of belonging, instead of as intrinsic to the ways in which belonging is generated.

This entanglement of bordering and reproductive practices in order to delineate the spaces of national belonging is a preoccupation that also inflects the story being told about integration policy under the Coalition government, which I turn to in Chap. 7.

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# 7

## Places of Sameness: Integration Policy, Localism and the Big Society

In this final chapter, I look at integration policy narratives under the Coalition government between 2010 and 2015, and relate them to government policies on localism and the Big Society. While rarely looked at together, these three policies are explicitly linked in government discourse and in the wider narratives that surround them. Their interrelationship relies on a particular way of thinking about the local. On the one hand, the local is promoted as the preferred site of policy interventions in relation to integration as opposed to ‘top-down’ integration strategies delivered by central government. At the same time, the local is conceptualized discursively as the space, or rather *place*, where individuals as citizens, as members of particular communities (including racialized groups) and an austere state ought to meet. Much important critical work has been done on how the Coalition’s localism agenda and the Conservative party’s vision of the ‘Big Society’ feed into the neo-liberal project of austerity and a smaller welfare state, some of which I engage with in this chapter. In considering the narratives surrounding these policies in their relation to the vision of integration that was being developed at the same time, I am particularly interested in the underlying assumptions about the nature of ‘place’ that underpin all three policy areas, and that instate an

understanding of our sense of place as ‘naturally’ tied to familiarity, sameness and stasis.

Thinking about local places of belonging in this manner becomes a way to tell a singular story about the local that produces difference as inevitably problematic and that sites that difference in the racialized bodies of Black and minority ethnic populations, migrants and Muslims. Muted, but nevertheless persistent, intersections of race with gender permeate this narrative, because of the ways in which a sense of place is attached to the feminized sphere of reproduction. On the one hand, this draws on a common-sense conceptualization of social and cultural reproductive activities as involving a mere ‘repetition of the same’ (Walker 1998: 166–167). In relation to integration, this strengthens the sense that any introduction of difference into places of belonging will inevitably be seen as a threat, because each of the groups involved in integration processes will ‘naturally’ want their ways of doing things to be repeated without change (Gedalof 2009, 2012). As we saw in the previous chapters, a particular conceptualization of the reproductive becomes tied to the sense of crisis that the narrative aims to address. On the other hand, the narrative works to construct minoritized groups as problematically reproducing relations of gendered inequalities and intolerance that the majority British ‘we’ has ostensibly left behind. Minoritized groups then become identified as responsible for introducing gendered ideologies and conflicts into spaces where they allegedly no longer exist. Gendered equality is used instrumentally, here, as one of a number of resources to close down attention to the structural relations of power that underpin the ‘problem’ of integration, and gender equality itself is culturalized and turned into a fixed quality that marks the boundary between a settled British majority and a racialized minority resistant to integration on majority terms. At the same time, the vision of the Big Society into which minoritized groups are expected to integrate quietly consolidates its own gendered inequalities, through its retrenchment of public sector support for the work of social reproduction, expecting mainly women to pick up the slack in unpaid caring work and volunteering (see Pearson and Elson 2015; Levitas 2012b).

The casting of the local as a place of necessary sameness is by no means unique to Coalition narratives. Indeed, as we will see, this is a

story that has been so relentlessly repeated by successive governments that it has congealed into the common-sense starting point of all mainstream accounts of managing difference, whether framed in terms of integration, multiculturalist accommodation or community cohesion. The assumption underpinning this story is that differences within local communities begin with the advent of large-scale migration and that it is natural for 'local people' to feel discomfort at the arrival of strangers who bring that difference with them. If, as Essed (2002) argues, one of the ways in which structural racism stays in place is through its repetition in everyday encounters, then we can see this particular repetition as an example of how the reproduction of such structures of exclusion operates. Even those who wish to make a positive argument about immigration and diversity (see, e.g., the IPPR report *Shared Ground*, Sachrajda and Griffith 2014) frame their narrative with a language of population 'flux and churn', as if these didn't exist before large-scale migration. The taken-for-grantedness of this narrative starting point becomes a kind of vicious circle or feedback loop between governments, political commentators and the electorate. If this is the only story on offer, and people participate in its repetition, then it becomes a closed narrative with its own logic of inevitability. Politicians retell the same story because it is what 'people on the doorstep' tell them, which they do because it is a story they hear repeated by media and politicians, and no one in mainstream political culture tells a different one. Yet, as Malcolm James found in his study on whiteness and collective memory in Newham, East London (James 2014), the persistence of this kind of narrative requires an active forgetting of the past, or an active repeating of stories one has never experienced. The policy narratives examined here participate in that active forgetting as well, as we will see. In doing so, they refuse alternative accounts of the local as a place where multiple trajectories intersect (Massey 2005), or as in Brah's concept of 'diaspora space', where genealogies of dispersion are entangled with those of staying put (Brah 1996: 181). These other ways of thinking about the local offer different resources for thinking about 'integration', but these alternatives are foreclosed by the narrative examined here, which, as we saw in the case of family migration in Chap. 6, sees all transnational entanglements as barriers to a proper sense of belonging.

## What Makes ‘the Local’ in Localism and How ‘Big’ Is the Big Society?

I begin by looking briefly at the language used in the Coalition government’s advocacy of localism and the Big Society to unpick what is at stake in this particular mobilization of the local, and will then move on to integration policy as the main focus of this chapter. The narrative on localism and the Big Society pulls together two storylines in order to make its case. First, it repeats the now-familiar neo-liberal thread that works to discount the role of the state in addressing (structural) inequalities and, instead, constitutes the state as an obstacle to its citizens’ self-actualization and sense of national and local belonging. Second, it flattens out the difference in/of local spaces so that ‘the people’ or ‘the community’ can be treated as a homogeneous group. The notoriously ‘slippery’ concept of community is depoliticized, declassed and deracialized here in order to serve an austerity project that undermines state provision, justifies welfare reform and public sector cuts, and covers over the structural inequalities within the spaces of the local (Hancock et al. 2012: 359).

The first government document to link localism, the Big Society and the small state was a brief Cabinet Office paper ‘Building the Big Society’, published soon after the election in May 2010. While this was actually not followed up with much in the way of extended policy documentation in relation to the Big Society, the document does highlight the Coalition framing of a focus on localism and a desire to move from state to voluntary and private sectors, and to individuals, as key agents of service provision, laying out the narrative tone and emphasis that were to be developed on these issues throughout the Coalition years:

Our Conservative–Liberal Democrat Government has come together with a driving ambition: to put more power and opportunity into people’s hands.

We want to give citizens, communities and local government the power and information they need to come together, solve the problems they face and build the Britain they want. We want society – the families, networks, neighbourhoods and communities that form the fabric of so much of our everyday lives – to be bigger and stronger than ever before. Only when

people and communities are given more power and take more responsibility can we achieve fairness and opportunity for all. (Cabinet Office 2010)

This narrative starting point of setting up a state–citizen dichotomy was to be reproduced in all the documentation leading up to the 2011 Localism Act. The important thing to note here is that communities, neighbourhoods, 'the people', are all presented as homogeneous entities. There is no recognition of heterogeneity, difference or division within these entities, which opens the door to some speaking for all. When 'people and communities' are seen as uniform and marked by sameness rather than multiplicity, then the kind of fairness and opportunity being offered is problematic. Each of the five principles outlined here and restated in the Localism Act—giving communities more powers; encouraging people to take an active role in their communities; transferring power from central to local government; supporting co-ops, mutual societies, charities and social enterprises; and publishing government data—can sound very empowering and, indeed, could be implemented in empowering ways, but only if the diversity of interests, identities and access to power and resources within local communities is acknowledged and forms part of these processes (see Levitas 2012b, for a contestatory re-reading of localism and the Big Society). But this is precisely what falls outside the government narrative of localism and the Big Society. Instead, a homogeneous sense of 'the people', 'the community' and 'the local' is pitted against an image of the central state as both over-intrusive and promoting selfishness, in that it encourages people to consume entitlements passively from the state. This narrative is fleshed out in David Cameron's speech to the 2010 autumn Conservative Party conference, in which localism and the Big Society featured heavily.

Here, the now familiar account of Labour's attachment to an overweening central state is again framed as producing a crisis of dependency, in this case, in relation to the concept of citizenship:

Yes, Labour centralised too much and told people they could fix every problem. But it was the rest of us who swallowed it, hoping that if the government took care of things, perhaps we wouldn't have to. Too many people thought: 'I've paid my taxes, the state will look after everything.'

But citizenship isn't a transaction in which you put your taxes in and get your services out. It's a relationship – you're part of something bigger than you, and it matters what you think and feel and do. So to get out of the mess we're in, changing the government is not enough. We need to change the way we think about ourselves, and our role in society. (Cameron 2010)

The resolution to the problem of too much state control is, it is claimed, to return power to 'the people', to counter the big state with the Big Society:

What I'm talking about, the spirit we need, is the big society spirit – and here's why I think its time has come.

All over the world, governments are wrestling with the same challenges. Not just building prosperous, competitive economies, providing good public services and paying for pensions but creating strong societies, improving quality of life, ensuring that everyone feels they belong. The countries that succeed will be those that find new ways of doing things, *new ways of harnessing the common good, better alternatives to the old-fashioned state*, and we're on the right side of that argument.

[...] *The old way of doing things: the high-spending, all-controlling, heavy-handed state, those ideas were defeated. Statism lost ... society won.* That's what happened at the last election and that's the change we're leading. From state power to people power. *From unchecked individualism to national unity and purpose.* From big government to the big society.[...] It's about government helping to build a nation of doers and go-getters, where people step forward not sit back, where people come together to make life better. (Cameron 2010, emphasis added)

The narrative on the Big Society repeats many of the tropes we've seen developed in relation to equality policy, welfare reform and 'social justice'—in particular, the framing of retrenchment policies as radical, transformatory, even revolutionary moves as against the old-fashioned paradigms of Labour, combined with the mobilizing of the neo-liberal language of individual self-actualization (a nation of doers and go-getters). The tweak here is to cast individualism as a problematic outcome of Labour's statism—where, in relation to equalities policy, the 'radical' move is to treat people as individuals instead of as being bound to their

collective identities, and, in relation to welfare reform, the appeal is to individuals to get on in life, here, people are being called on to reject the unchecked individualism, the 'selfishness of the Labour years' (Cameron 2010) and to embrace their collective attachment to 'national unity and purpose' and 'the common good'. Of course, part of the reason for an appeal to the common good in this context was to bolster Cameron's oft-repeated claim that 'we are all in this together', to prepare the discursive ground for the massive spending cuts to come, as he also acknowledges in this speech:

A country defined not by what we consume but by what we contribute. A country, a society where we say: I am not alone. I will play my part. I will work with others to give Britain a brand new start.

Over the coming months, we will need that spirit as we face up to our financial responsibilities. Everyone knows that this government is undertaking a programme of spending cuts. I know how anxious people are. 'Yes', they say: 'of course we need to cut spending. But do we have to cut now, and by this much? Isn't there another way?' I wish there was another way. I wish there was an easier way. But I tell you: there is no other responsible way. (Cameron 2010)

But I think the appeal to this particular version of collective identity is doing something more here. The rhetorical appeal to the people, the nation, the common good does the work of addressing its listeners as part of a uniform whole, defined by their sameness to each other, and this erasure of difference—which the neo-liberal language of the individual tries to tame and manage, but not entirely eliminate—is necessary for underpinning the vision of the local and the community that are to be developed in the stories being told about both localism and, as we shall see later, integration.

Here, we see Cameron addressing 'the people' in this uniform way, as if everyone's interests are identical, so that the localism agenda can be framed as a direct transfer of power to all:

On 11 May, a great shadow was cast over the empire of the quangocrats, the bureaucrats and the power-hoarders. He is the enemy of the

bureaucratic state. Public chum number one. The big man on the side of the people. Eric Pickles. Eric has come in to government and hit the ground sprinting, leading the most radical shift in power this country has seen for decades.

More freedom for local councils to keep more of the money when they attract business to their area, to finance big new infrastructure projects and to run new services. More power for neighbourhoods to keep local pubs open, stop post offices from closing, to run local parks, to plan the look, shape and feel of their area. New powers to you to choose the hospital you get treated in, the school your child goes to.

And because information is power, we're bringing transparency to government. All those things the last government kept from you, who spends your money, what they spend it on, what the results are, where the waste is, we're putting it in your hands. After all, it's your money – so you should see where it's going.

This is not about a bit more power for you and a bit less power for central government – it's a revolution.

Let's leave Labour defending the status quo, the vested interests, the unions, the quangocrats, the elites, the establishment. We are the radicals now, breaking apart the old system with a massive transfer for power, from the state to citizens, politicians to people, government to society. That is the power shift this country needs today. [...] This is the reform our public services need. From top-down to bottom-up. From state power to people power. The big society spirit blasting through. (Cameron 2010)

As we saw Iain Duncan Smith doing in relation to welfare reform and 'social justice', here, Cameron appropriates the language of radical social change in order to invite identification with the new government's stance. Of course, we need to note that the localism agenda was accompanied by massive cuts to local government spending, and that the appeal to people power can be seen as a cynical cover-up for the withdrawal of that funding. Overstating the power of what Cameron refers to as the 'big, giant state monopolies', inviting people who work in public services to 'set up as a co-operative, be your own boss, do things your way' or 'saying to business, faith groups, charities, social enterprises – come in and provide a great service' is putting a progressive gloss on the withdrawal of state provision and massive retrenchment of the welfare state. As Ruth Levitas has argued:



Talk of the 'Big Society' is, in the mouths of the Coalition, little more than an attempt to get necessary social labour done for nothing, disproportionately by women, by pushing work back across the market/non-market boundary. We'll sack your librarians, but if you want you can keep using volunteers. We'll cut your care services, so if you don't look after your relatives and neighbours they will be abandoned, or left unfed and untended even in hospitals. (Levitas 2012b: 322)

But we also need to note the work that the rhetorical appeal to 'the people' is doing here, and how this creates a ground for a vision of the local in which private commercial providers can as easily (or more easily) stand in for 'the community' as grass-roots organizations, and in which differential access to political, social and cultural capital and economic resources within local spaces is erased. These, indeed, are the concerns that have been expressed by critical studies of both localism (McCarvill 2010; Levitas 2012b) and the Big Society, where 'those with sharpest elbows and the loudest voices' prevail (Gill and Sveinsson 2011: 2). In its final 'Big Society Audit' in 2015, Civil Exchange notes that 'the Big Society leaves the voluntary sector – a key source of support for disadvantaged groups and route to understanding their needs – not strengthened but weakened' (Civil Exchange 2015: 2) and concludes that a 'market-based model for reforming public services is concentrating power in the hands of new "quasi-monopoly" private sector providers rather than in those of local people and is reducing, not increasing, transparency and accountability' (ibid.: 6).

In relation to questions of race, Gill and Sveinsson identify three particularly problematic aspects of the ways in which the Big Society is conceptualized:

The first point is that the Big Society is hugely reliant on social capital to be effective. BME [Black and minority ethnic] communities, in particular those who are newly arrived in the UK, are far less likely to have the sort of weak ties (such as informal conversations with the person delivering the post) that an RSA [Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts] report identified as so crucial for securing this capital. [...]

Secondly, even if a BME community group successfully negotiates the various obstacles involved in bidding for a service, the loss of the council as a neutral arbiter could be potentially damaging for community relations [...]

Finally, the Big Society contains no distinction between benevolent and malevolent communal action. It is taking place in a socio-economic environment of increased tension which has already led to outbreaks of violence and intimidation against communities in the UK, particularly Muslims. Taking services out of the hands of bodies with a statutory commitment to equality and opening them up to groups of any ideology or belief has grave potential for social harm. (Gill and Sveinsson 2011: 9)

These failings become particularly acute when the language of localism is brought into play in relation to integration policy, which I turn to in the next section.

## Multiculturalism, Narratives of Loss and the Common

Across the three sites of policy examined here, there is a shared understanding of the space of 'the local' that involves a number of problematic but strongly sedimented assumptions. These build on the well-established conceptualization of space itself as static, as opposed to the dynamism of time, and as riddled with the fixities of boundary-erecting identities that Doreen Massey has explored in her critique of dominant philosophical and political theorizations of space (Massey 2005). The concept of place, usually evoked as 'local place', Massey argues, 'has come to have totemic resonance' and its 'symbolic value is endlessly mobilised in political argument' (Massey 2005: 5). Whether defined as a sphere of the everyday, of real and valued practices, and of meanings that can be held onto in an increasingly alienating proliferation of 'the global'—or, more explicitly, as a site of retreat and protection against 'new invasions'—place is here framed as a 'politically conservative haven' marked by stasis, closure and coherent, uniform identities (ibid.: 6). This vision of place underpins the stories being told about integration and localism in contemporary policy in fundamental ways. These are narratives of the loss of a homogeneity that is seen as necessary to a sense of local belonging, narratives that construct a remembering of a homogeneous past that only works through

an active forgetting of existing heterogeneities, and that aim to stabilize the meaning of the local 'here' by projecting difference onto an 'elsewhere' that they are not. Rather than the interrelational view of space that Massey advocates, in which multiple 'distinct trajectories co-exist' and which are always under construction, what she calls a 'simultaneity of stories-so-far' (Massey 2005: 9), these are singular narratives that both explicitly and implicitly close down the opportunities for the local to be recognized as a site of difference. In relation to integration policy, this framing of the local strips it of its entanglements with transnational political contexts—stripping place of its global stories diminishes attention to the structural relations that produce the convergence of different trajectories, so that belonging or not-belonging to a particular place is reduced to a judgement on the ways in which fixed and de-historicized 'cultures' can be made to fit together. Denial of the structural divisions and heterogeneities of place leaves privileges of class, race and gender intact, so that questions of who gets to speak for the local, or how big the 'Big Society' actually is, remain unexamined.

As we have already seen, much of this works through a mobilizing of notions of 'the common'—the common good of 'the people', a common culture of 'the nation' and a naturalized common sense. Rhetorical moves to foreground these various versions of the common become a way to instate sameness as the necessary precondition for belonging. This becomes particularly problematic when the localism agenda meets integration strategy. This evocation of the local as a space of certainty and uniformity, and of 'diversity' as a threat to common belonging and solidarity, began long before the Coalition government, and, as many have already demonstrated (Kapoor 2013; Kundnani 2007; Gilroy 2012; Ratcliffe 2012), was already well-established under New Labour's embracing of a community cohesion agenda in the early 2000s. As I have argued elsewhere (Gedalof 2012), the publication in 2004 of David Goodhart's *Prospect* essay 'Too Diverse?' and of the report by Ted Cante of the Community Cohesion Panel for the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), as well as the subsequent publications of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, all share a narrative that starts with an evocation of a past in which, in Goodhart's words:

Britain in the 50s was a country stratified by class and region. But in most of its cities, suburbs, towns and villages there was a good chance of predicting the attitudes, even the behaviour, of the people living in your immediate neighbourhood. In many parts of Britain today that is no longer true. The country has long ceased to be Orwell's 'family'. (Goodhart 2004)

Or, as then Communities and Local Government Secretary Ruth Kelly said:

And as this complex picture evolves, there are white Britons who do not feel comfortable with change. They see the shops and restaurants in their town centres changing. They see their neighbourhoods becoming more diverse. Detached from the benefits of those changes, they begin to believe the stories about ethnic minorities getting special treatment, and to develop a resentment, a sense of grievance.

The issues become a catalyst for a debate about who we are and what we are as a country. About what it means to live in a town where the faces you see on the way to the supermarket have changed and may be constantly changing. (Kelly 2006)

This basic starting point has been picked up and systematically reproduced in the Coalition account, despite the framing of its repetition as a break with New Labour's approach. In January 2010, then Conservative Shadow Spokesman for Justice Dominic Grieve (later to become Attorney General in the Coalition government) responded to an invitation from the Runnymede Trust to elaborate a Conservative vision of community cohesion (Runnymede 2010). Grieve's extended argument offers a first opportunity to unpick the political grammar of the narrative on integration as it was to develop under the Coalition government, and of its underlying assumptions about place and its relationship to sameness and difference, as well as an articulation of the relationship between the local and a central state.

Grieve's account begins with two linked assumptions which had already been circulating in New Labour's account of both equality and community cohesion policies: first, that too much attention to 'diversity', understood particularly as racial and ethnic diversity, was leading to a narrow identity politics of divisive 'special pleading'; and, second, that

the challenges of a diverse population with heterogeneous interests, values and identities are necessarily linked to migration and the emergence of ethnic and racial minorities. As Grieve puts it:

The debate on the growth of ethnic and cultural diversity in Britain, and *the identity politics that flows from it*, challenges our thinking on our nation's social fabric and its character. It is a difficult topic but it cannot be ignored. The issue of achieving successful co-existence between people of diverse backgrounds is one of which we are constantly made aware. We are experiencing globalization through large scale movements of peoples encouraged by both population growth, deteriorating economic and environmental conditions in some countries, and by the potential offered by technological advances. *As a result there are more of us living in the same defined geographical space with differing political ideals, religious beliefs, perceptions of the past and the cultural differences that flow from these.* (Runnymede 2010: 3, emphasis added)

As in all of these accounts, the story of difference begins with migration, at times dated to the postwar period, but increasingly, as in Grieve's account, with an emphasis on the more recent mass migrations of globalization. Starting the story here presumes two things: first, that differences of ideals, beliefs, values and senses of the past somehow only exist in the presence of migrants; and, second, that ethnic/cultural diversity leads inevitably to a kind of narrow and divisive identity politics. This is a common linkage, but it is not inevitable; as Iris Marion Young has argued, the claims of minorities are often framed or understood from the outside as identity/recognition claims but are as often to do with unequal access to economic and political resources, the kinds of contestations that can mark any community which is structured unequally (Young 2000: 106). Nevertheless, here, Grieve reproduces that logic of culturalizing difference, while also spatializing the problem as one that injects difference into the 'same defined geographical space' where it allegedly did not exist before.

By the end of the noughties, post-9/11 and the civil disturbances in Burnley, Bradford and Oldham in 2001, and post-7/7 in 2005, what is added to this narrative starting point is the threat of Muslim extremism, so community cohesion and terrorism are increasingly discursively linked, as Grieve elaborates:

Community cohesion is a display of the values of a country and so has a significant political dimension to it. [...] *A fragmented, dysfunctional or fearful society is clearly one open to divisions which can be exploited by those wanting to stir up violence, or promote political or religious extremism.* To allow conditions to develop which would permit such a threat to materialize would be breaking the contract between government and the people who had elected it to safeguard their interests. (Runnymede 2010: 3, emphasis added)

Grieve then moves to identify the crisis that the convergence of these dangerous forms of difference has led to, and this crisis point is located in the policy of multiculturalism:

Multiculturalism thus became part of the nation's received wisdom at the end of the 20th century and the approach had some value. It has done much to teach us about each other's cultures and to have respect for individual differences. [...]

Multiculturalism was intended to create a more cohesive and friendlier society by facilitating bringing people together to achieve a shared future. But instead the concepts underlying it seem better able to drive people apart by *endangering our traditional sense of community based on shared values collectively acquired.* There is a dichotomy here. While acknowledging the importance of shared values as a basis on which multiculturalism can flourish, what has actually happened through a corruption of multiculturalism into political correctness is an undervaluing of existing British identity [...] With multiculturalism a whole industry of political correctness has sprung up on its back until we have reached the point that policy logic has overridden *common sense.*

In its purest sense multiculturalism is a reflection of a society of diverse cultures. But in its corruptive sense it has come to mean a political philosophy that is a mixture of political correctness, grossly exaggerated respect for cultural identity of groups and a tendency to deal with people as if they should be categories for policy purposes in convenient niches of faith, race or colour. [...] While this has been happening *the common values* that can unite us have been attacked. (Runnymede 2010: 4–5, emphasis added)

Multiculturalism produces a crisis here because of its attack on all things 'common'—a sense of community based on shared values is undermined by an exaggerated respect for cultural differences, an ability to

appeal to the common good is undercut by dividing 'the people' into categories of 'faith, race or colour', and common sense is attacked through 'a whole industry of political correctness'. But what is this common that is being attacked? As Young has argued, appeals to a common good that is prior to any engagement with difference obviate the need to go beyond one's own perspective: 'even if they need the others to see what they all share, each finds in the other only a mirror for him- or herself' (Young 1997: 66). The privileging of sameness over difference results not in the production of universal values but, rather, in the effective universalizing of the particular interests and perspectives of dominant groups. In the context of inequality, it is the perspective on the common good of the privileged that is likely to dominate. Young argues that common values and a shared language cannot be presumed or asserted as a necessary starting point; they can only be the necessarily contingent products or achievements of ongoing social and political contestation and debate. Appeals to common sense are precisely what foreclose that ongoing contestation and debate. The presumed reader of this narrative is invited to stay in the comfort zone of what he or she already knows, to stay with the common sense certainties that the narrative is so busily working to reproduce. As Alana Lentin has argued '[t]he surety with which the need for cultural compatibility is being expressed today denies the negotiation, challenge and conflict that is essential to politics' (Lentin 2014: 1283). Appeals to common sense, comforting as they are, also reinstate that certainty about the necessary nature of place as a zone of stable familiarity, and that sense that 'of course' it is natural and reasonable to want this to persist.

At the same time, the narrative deploys what Teun van Dijk (1992) identified as a common rhetorical strategy of the denial of racism, the reversal of power relations between dominant and subordinated groups. The rejection of common values and common sense of this 'corruptive' multiculturalism deepens the crisis by silencing and censoring the ability of the majority to say what is obvious and to assert its 'natural' influence over how all people should think and behave:

*Skewed multiculturalism has forced people to a great extent into thinking of their own type as distinct groups rather than as parts of a whole. Once the identity of that group becomes its primary interest, it then needs to be*

defended and enhanced whether through *special treatment or specific privileges*.

A further problem is that *people also do not then feel free to modify each other's behaviour if the unpredictable line of political correctness frightens them*. The zealous regulation of conduct, the imposition of State-defined orthodoxy on public and private conscience, and the overburdening of law and regulation, have the consequence of *undermining that confidence and deterring participation and engagement*. Fear itself creates uncertainty and we are finding the centre of the debate becomes the validity of political correctness itself rather than the appropriateness of a word or action. (Runnymede 2010: 7, emphasis added)

Here, we need to pay attention to how the narrative positions different people, depending on whether they are presumed to be the subjects or objects, victors or victims of multiculturalism. In the first paragraph, the 'people' who are thinking of themselves as distinct groups entitled to special treatment and privileges are the minorities who have taken themselves out of 'the whole'. This is clearly not seen as a problem to which the white British majority is prone. In the second paragraph, that majority is positioned as the people silenced by political correctness, a state-defined orthodoxy and the zealous regulation of their conduct. Here, the 'people' of the majority are stripped of their ability to modify others' behaviour—since the problem of narrow group thinking is never their problem, but always that of the minoritized, their freedom to modify the behaviours of others is simply an expression of the common good, and it is this common-sense freedom to enact the common good that is being denied by multiculturalism. The state—with its overburdening orthodoxy and regulation—is pitted against the common sense of the people, and this becomes the rationale for linking integration policy to localism and 'Big Society' agendas.

The final element of Grieve's account I want to consider takes us from space to time, or rather the ways in which the narrative imagines the interrelationship between spatial belonging and historical memory. Indeed, here, Grieve directly addresses the question of who should control the narrative of the past out of which this sense of the common is to emerge. Responding to Bikhu Parekh's report for Runnymede in 2000 on



‘The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain’, Grieve is particularly concerned ‘about the desire expressed in the Parekh Report of “reimagining our national story”’ (Runnymede 2010: 9):

A national character is *organic, being shaped by its past and inter cultural exchanges*. Fragmentation of the past means that the anchors of society are weakened, becoming increasingly meaningless.

[...] In schools, the dumbing down of history has resulted in a system where the teaching of a narrative of British history has all but vanished. *Instead of children being taught to take interest in and have respect for past events and individuals who have shaped their lives, they are encouraged to be contemptuous of people who in the past did not live up to the then unknown values of modern Britain.*

[...] *I am convinced that negation of our past has hindered more recent immigrants to this country developing a sense of belonging. Faced with a society that seems to be suffering an identity crisis, should we be surprised that they find a common identity with their fellow countrymen hard to identify?* (Runnymede 2010: 9, emphasis added)

Grieve’s narrative is one that offers a certain acknowledgement that the national story might, in part, be made up of ‘intercultural exchanges’, and that ‘the varied stories of newcomers and their history of their countries of origins and the circumstances in which they or their forebears made the choice to come to Britain are all part of our shared historical narrative’ (Runnymede 2010: 9), but then quickly places limits on the interrelational, mutable nature of the ‘national character’. The past cannot be re-imagined too much lest it become ‘fragmented’ and the only productive narrative of British history is one of respect for past events and individuals. Too much critique is reduced to being contemptuous, and then to negating the past altogether. This negation then becomes both an identity crisis for ‘natives’ and the ground for non-belonging for more recent migrants. When this negation of the past is accompanied by ‘a citizenship definition that is chiefly seen as the portal for the consumption of State services and for demanding special privileges funded at the State’s expense’ (Runnymede 2010: 10), then it is no surprise to Grieve that integration policy is turning into its opposite:

We should also have the self-confidence to conclude that we have reached a point in respect of the evolution of community cohesion in Britain where there is sufficient commonality of aspiration between people of all backgrounds to enable us to shift the emphasis away from targeted privileges that favour one group over another, to creating opportunities for all. *There is clear evidence that they create division and undermine the objectives for which we should be striving.* Some confidence building measures may still be needed but *the sooner we can move away from State dispensed favours to particular ethnic or religious groups the better.* (Runnymede 2010: 10, emphasis added)

Integration policy is thus aligned with the retrenchments to equality policy examined in Chap. 2. Additionally there is a further turn away from the central state as source of the crisis and a turn towards a flattened out space of the local and local interaction as the site where problems of integration and belonging should be worked out:

All the signs are today that where people do not co-operate together for the common good it is because *there is a breakdown of neighbourly society.* We need to make every effort to resuscitate it. We recognize that solutions must involve a higher degree of local involvement as it is those who have first-hand knowledge of the local landscape, with all its high and low spots, who are best able to construct the right response. (Runnymede 2010: 10)

Grieve's evocation of a neighbourly society brings us back to the place of the local of Goodhart and Kelly, where neighbourliness is equated to living with people like you, and threats to that neighbourliness are an inevitable result of strangers who fail to become like you—a vision of the local reiterated the following year by Prime Minister David Cameron:

Real communities are bound by common experiences forged by friendship and conversation, knotted together by all the rituals of the neighbourhood, from the school run to the chat down the pub. And these bonds take time. So real integration takes time. That's why, when there have been significant numbers of new people arriving in neighbourhoods, perhaps not being able to speak the same language as those living there, on occasions not really wanting or even willing to integrate, that has created a kind of discomfort and disjointedness in some neighbourhoods. This has been the

experience for many people in our country – and I believe it is untruthful and unfair not to speak about it and address it. (Cameron 2011b)

If we pull all these narrative strands together, what do we have? The local as a place of necessary sameness, history as one common story stripped of conflict and transnational power inequalities, difference as also stripped from its local–global entanglements and turned into a rigid ‘cultural’ unwillingness to adapt. A central state that ends up exacerbating difference and division by dispensing privileges to minorities and silencing the entirely reasonable objections of the majority. But also, we should ask what gets left out of this vision of an ‘integrated’ community? Talk of school runs and pub chats presents an image of a place already fixed in its rituals instead of one in a constant process of remaking through the meeting together of multiple trajectories, but also one in which the kinds of work people do, their differential access to housing and other resources and services, as well as the gendered and other inequalities embedded in everyday interactions, have already stitched difference into the fabric of the local. None of these challenges to a fantasy of sameness are allowed a footing in this vision of place.

## Sameness and Difference in Coalition Integration Strategy

Cameron expanded these themes in his speech to the Munich Security Conference, in February 2011, where he identifies ‘state multiculturalism’ as a failed policy that not only inhibits integration, but also creates a breeding ground for Islamist extremism and terrorism:

*We have got to get to the root of the problem, and we need to be absolutely clear on where the origins of these terrorist attacks lie. That is the existence of an ideology, Islamist extremism.*

[...] Now, I’m not saying that these issues of poverty and grievance about foreign policy are not important. Yes, of course we must tackle them. Of course we must tackle poverty. Yes, we must resolve the sources of tension, not least in Palestine, and yes, we should be on the side of openness and political reform in the Middle East. [...] But let us not fool ourselves.

These are *just contributory factors*. Even if we sorted out all of the problems that I have mentioned, there would still be this terrorism. I believe the root lies in the existence of this extremist ideology. I would argue an important reason so many young Muslims are drawn to it comes down to a *question of identity*. (Cameron 2011a)

Here, Cameron's narrative acknowledges and then discounts any of the geo-political and structural sources of conflict and inequality that might be part of the trajectory bringing extremism and terrorism into the space of Europe. By arguing that these are only contributory factors, and that the root of the problem lies in ideology and identity, Cameron reproduces a culturalizing account that separates off from responsibility any part Western states might have had in creating those transnational structural inequalities. Where Western states have been complicit, though, is in their tolerance of difference through 'state multiculturalism':

Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream. We've failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong. We've even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run completely counter to our values.

So, when a white person holds objectionable views, racist views for instance, we rightly condemn them. But when equally unacceptable views or practices come from someone who isn't white, we've been too cautious frankly – frankly, even fearful – to stand up to them. The failure, for instance, of some to confront the horrors of forced marriage, the practice where some young girls are bullied and sometimes taken abroad to marry someone when they don't want to, is a case in point. This hands-off tolerance has only served to reinforce the sense that not enough is shared. And this all leaves some young Muslims feeling rootless. And the search for something to belong to and something to believe in can lead them to this extremist ideology. Now for sure, they don't turn into terrorists overnight, but what we see – and what we see in so many European countries – is a process of radicalisation. (Cameron 2011a)

This narrative addresses the white Western reader/listener as both blameless and overly generous, as needlessly self-censoring in regard to what he/she knows is 'the right thing' for fear of accusations of racism

from an overly powerful, intolerant and unjust minority. The white listener/reader is given permission here to disavow difference, because that difference is so patently tied to a refusal to integrate, to accept 'our' values, which are so clearly in the right. Here, the yardstick of gender equality is once again brought in as proxy for the majority values that need to be more robustly asserted, and as part of the 'clear sense of shared national identity that is open to everyone' (ibid.):

Frankly, we need a lot less of the passive tolerance of recent years and a much more active, muscular liberalism. A passively tolerant society says to its citizens, as long as you obey the law we will just leave you alone. It stands neutral between different values. But I believe a genuinely liberal country does much more; it believes in certain values and actively promotes them. Freedom of speech, freedom of worship, democracy, the rule of law, equal rights regardless of race, sex or sexuality. It says to its citizens, this is what defines us as a society: to belong here is to believe in these things. Now, each of us in our own countries, I believe, must be unambiguous and hard-nosed about this defence of our liberty. (Cameron 2011a)

As we've seen in the narratives on troubled families and welfare reform, here, Cameron occupies, with a great sense of entitlement and ease, the position of the 'plain speaker' who can cut through complexities to see a straightforward line of argument, to speak simple truths. Rejecting the complex ground of intersecting trajectories, of 'stories-so-far', the problem of integration becomes a simple confrontation of fixed cultures or ideologies, one that embodies a set of desirable values and one that rejects them. A guilt-free assertion of those values is what is needed to address the problem. Any attention to the gap between the promise and delivery of those values is foreclosed, as is any consideration of the ways in which that gap might have been productive of the isolation or exclusion of minoritized communities and of the wider global conflicts that feed extreme rejections of the integration on offer in the local.

There are practical things that we can do as well. That includes making sure that immigrants speak the language of their new home and ensuring that people are educated in the elements of a common culture and curriculum. [...] I also believe we should encourage meaningful and active participa-

tion in society, by *shifting the balance of power away from the state and towards the people. That way, common purpose can be formed as people come together and work together in their neighbourhoods.* It will also help build stronger pride in local identity, so people feel free to say, 'Yes, I am a Muslim, I am a Hindu, I am Christian, but I am also a Londoner or a Berliner too'. It's that identity, that feeling of belonging in our countries, that I believe is the key to achieving true cohesion. (Cameron 2011a, emphasis added)

By taking 'state multiculturalism' as his target in the context of a speech on security, Cameron sutures together the narratives on integration and Islamist extremism/terrorism, making them, in effect, the same story. But, at the same time, because of the targeting of an overweening central state as source of the crisis in identity, integration is framed primarily as a local policy issue. While countering extremism and terrorism is something that the central state must legitimately address, the rest of the integration agenda is seen as best dealt with at the local level. This framing of the problem is repeated in the Coalition government's Integration Policy document, 'Creating the Conditions for Integration', which was published in February 2012 (DCLG 2012). So, the introduction states:

*Integration is achieved when neighbourhoods, families and individuals come together on issues which matter to them, and so we are committed to rebalancing activity from centrally-led to locally-led action and from the public to the voluntary and private sectors.* But this also means that we all have a role to play in creating an integrated society. This document is therefore a challenge to local public, private and voluntary sectors to support these ends in all that they do.

*Integration benefits us all, and extremism and intolerance undermine this as they promote fear and division. An integrated society may be better equipped to reject extremism and marginalise extremists.* The approach to integrated communities set out here is therefore central to long term action to counter extremism. [...] We will therefore continue our efforts to challenge and outflank extremism, and we will strongly encourage others in the public and private sectors and in local communities to do likewise. (DCLG 2012, emphasis added)

Again, this linking of integration or community cohesion and counter-extremisms agendas is not new; under New Labour, Community Cohesion and Prevent strategies were already being tied to each other so that ‘cohesive communities were those who managed to efface “diversity” through their own mechanisms of self-policing’ (Kapoor 2013: 1042).

The document reproduces the now-familiar chronology in which integration becomes a ‘problem’ in the early 2000s:

Since 2001, concern about race relations, immigrants or immigration has been an important issue with latest data (from December 2011) showing that around one in five (22 per cent) people say it is an important issue. *A small number of places have experienced problems, with established communities unable to respond to the pace of change, and incoming migrants to some communities unable or unwilling to integrate.* The Prime Minister has talked about ensuring greater control over immigration to make it a source of national strength rather than a concern. (DCLG 2012: 3, emphasis added)

Two things need to be noted about this way of starting the story. First, as mentioned earlier, is the effect of beginning the story of integration in 2001. Globally, 2001 resonates with 9/11, while in the UK it is the moment of the Oldham, Burnley and Bradford disturbances, which quickly became associated with the discourse of segregated communities and the community cohesion agenda. Starting the story here already ties the issue of integration to the Muslim community and the threat of extremism. What it also does, of course, is discount the years of anti-racist struggles prior to 2001, and the narrative in which Black and minority ethnic communities contested their exclusions from, and the unequal terms of their inclusion in, British society. Kundnani (2007: 26) argues that this was the moment when the liberal left started talking about Britishness and cohesion—so, gesturing towards a left–right coalition moment of constructing and disavowing ‘state multiculturalism’. As Kundnani argues:

It mattered little that segregation, in those parts of Britain where it existed, such as Oldham, Burnley and Bradford, was not the result of a liberal over-emphasis on diversity but an interaction between industrial decline, ‘white

flight' and institutional racism. After 2001, that history had been forgotten and its causality reversed so that it was 'Muslims' who were held responsible for refusing to mix, while 'multiculturalism' was blamed for allowing their 'self-segregation'. (Kundnani 2007: 27)

Second, we need to note how the native–migrant relation is constructed in this passage—established communities are unable to respond to the pace of change while incoming migrants are unable or unwilling to integrate. While, at first glance, this would appear to distribute the problem equally between the two parties, a closer examination shows that the burden of blame lies with the incomers. They are responsible both for the 'pace of change' which established communities find difficult and for their own failure to integrate. This takes us back to the construction of local spaces as sites of stasis and sameness until the migrant or minority arrives. It also, as the Runnymede Trust argued in its critique of the policy document, instates integration as a one-way process in which all the burden of integration lies with minoritized groups (Runnymede 2012: 1). And, as Runnymede also argues, anti-racism falls out of the conversation altogether, as do any specific measures to ensure that racialized disadvantage is addressed (*ibid.*: 2–4).

Folding integration policy into the localism agenda provides a rationale for this evasion of any specific measures to address inequality. Indeed, as in the community cohesion discourse developed under Labour, and as expressed by both Grieve and Cameron, there is an assertion that it is more important to 'understand and protect the values, experiences and opportunities which bring people together to act on issues which matter to them' (DCLG 2012: 4) and to develop the 'common ground' defined as a 'clear sense of shared aspirations and values, which focuses on what we have in common rather than our differences' (DCLG 2012: 5). While the emphasis on shared values does the work of reinforcing the centrality of the majority culture, and of reassuring the privileged majority that there is no need for them to change, or to adapt to the realities of the dynamic 'diaspora space' (Brah 1996) in which they find themselves, it also situates the 'problem' of accommodating differences in the space of 'culture', rather than seeing that at least part of the problem is a result of structural, racialized disadvantage and inequality. The primary focus on



instating a common ground works to ensure that the socio-economic and political factors that might keep people apart—racism, inequality of access to resources and to the power to influence how a community develops—are shunted to the edges of the narrative. This, in turn, reinforces the argument that integration issues are best addressed in ways that don't involve the state, linking integration to the localist and 'Big Society' agendas for a smaller central state:

Help from local, or, exceptionally, from national government, can create better conditions for integration.

It is only common sense to support integration. *Successful, integrated communities are ones that make better use of informal support and care; are better equipped to resolve their own problems without state intervention; and can have higher levels of volunteering, social support networks and charity.*

In the past, integration challenges have been met in part with legal rights and obligations around equalities, discrimination and hate crime. This has not solved the problem and, *where it has encouraged a focus on single issues and specific groups, may in some cases have exacerbated it.* There are too many people still left outside, or choosing to remain outside, mainstream society. Today, the challenges we face *are too complex for laws and powers to provide the sole solution. They cannot be defined simply by race, or faith.* Location, socio-economic status, ethnicity, faith, culture and a range of other factors come together to make each neighbourhood what it is. Issues which may affect integration within and between neighbourhoods include cultural attitudes and practices; the ability to participate in society; opportunities for social mobility; and a life free from intolerance and discrimination.

Today, integration requires changes to society, not changes to the law. This means that building a more integrated society is not just a job for government. It requires collective action across a wide range of issues, at national and local levels, by public bodies, private companies and, above all, civic society at large. (DCLG 2012: 6, emphasis added)

Here, the argument for localism becomes an argument for turning away from anti-discrimination and equality law—which is, of course, the remit of the central state. While it is acknowledged that 'intolerance and discrimination' may affect possibilities of integration, these cannot be allowed to dominate the narrative—indeed, too much attention to such things will only exacerbate the problem by encouraging a focus on single

issues and specific groups. Rather than attending to the specific ways in which structural exclusions and disadvantage operate, the problem is that too many people are outside the mainstream—focusing on their specific differences only perpetuates their being left, or choosing to remain, outside that mainstream. What is not said openly here, but what critics such as Runnymede have pointed out (Runnymede 2012), is that specific anti-racism measures and policies are considered to be part of the problem, and need to be replaced by more ‘mainstream’ approaches. This is framed as moving from the simple to the complex—from a ‘simple’ focus on race or faith to a range of structural and cultural factors—and from a reliance on the state or the law to a more wide-reaching approach to social change involving a greater variety of social actors. The promise of the grass-roots transformatory power of a kind of radical localism is pressed into service here, and is contrasted with the more limited and bureaucratic instrument of the law’s formal framing of equality, but to what ends?

Going forward, our first question must always be ‘how can people contribute to building an integrated England?’ *In the past, neighbourhoods, families and individuals have come together naturally* on issues which matter to them. Where problems have emerged, there are countless examples of local groups and individuals standing up for tolerance. Through determination, hard work and a readiness to do new things, and *in some circumstances to overcome discrimination, prejudice and intolerance*, people have not only built links between their different faiths and cultures but have made their local areas better.

*Government must not, as happens too often, stand in the way by dictating general solutions to complex local issues, or seeming to label some people as ‘different’ or requiring special treatment.* (DCLG 2012: 6)

Here, again, the promised complexity of an attention to the local is closed down in two ways. First, there is a backward-looking evocation of local places as coming together naturally, which might sometimes involve overcoming ‘discrimination, prejudice and intolerance’, but even this could be done better by letting people get on with it on their own. Second, government is understood as standing in the way of these natural solutions by insisting on attending to difference, or by imposing the ‘special treatment’ of state multiculturalism. A local politics of difference—

underpinned by a more challenging understanding of the local as produced through a specific set of social relations, including the coming-together of multiple trajectories and narratives, of differential access to power and resources, as necessitating the complex negotiation of multiplicities, including those structured by class, gender, race, and so on—is closed off from view. As Massey argues (2005: 102), ‘a persistent defence of the local, qua the local, without regard to the constitutive social relations, can lead to a lack of address of the local itself’. This occurs in the Integration Strategy when local communities are seen as having ‘naturally’ resolved issues in the past through goodwill and determination, an example of what Massey calls a ‘backward looking to a past that never was’ (Massey 2005: 65), an attempt to tame space (or especially local ‘place’) by framing it in terms of closure, or ‘the romance of a pre-given collective identity’ (ibid.: 140). This closure, for Massey:

robs ‘the spatial’ [...] of one of its potentially disruptive characteristics: precisely its juxtaposition, its happenstance arrangement-in-relation-to-each-other, of previously unconnected narratives/temporalities; its openness and its condition of always being made. It is this crucial characteristic of ‘the spatial’ which constitutes it as one of the vital moments in the production of those dislocations which are necessary to the existence of the political. (Massey 2005: 39)

For Massey, ‘[r]econceptualising place in this way puts on the agenda a different set of political questions. There can be no assumption of pre-given coherence or of community or collective identity. Rather the throwtogetherness of place demands negotiation. [...] They require that, in one way or another, we confront the challenge of the negotiation of multiplicity’ (Massey 2005: 141).

It is precisely this different set of political questions that is foreclosed in the Integration Strategy, however, through the ways in which it conceptualizes both the local and the ways in which local integration is to proceed. How does this happen? The document identifies five factors that the government sees as key to integration. These are:

- Common ground: A clear sense of shared aspirations and values, which focuses on what we have in common rather than our differences.

- Responsibility: A strong sense of our mutual commitments and obligations, which brings personal and social responsibility.
- Social mobility: People able to realise their potential to get on in life.
- Participation and empowerment: People of all backgrounds have the opportunities to take part, be heard and take decisions in local and national life.
- Tackling intolerance and extremism: A robust response to threats, whether discrimination, extremism or disorder, that deepen division and increase tensions (DCLG 2012: 5)

The first two of these reiterate the emphasis on identifying the common and the need to strengthen all people's attachments to the common; insofar as there is very little consideration of who has the power to determine what constitutes the common, this places limits on the degree to which those 'mutual commitments and obligations' are to be the result of an ongoing negotiation of multiplicity. While the document, for example, does gesture towards 'creating the space for an honest and open debate' and ensuring that 'this debate enables different organisations and individuals to come together to develop their own solutions locally' (DCLG 2012: 7), the subject of these debates is then closed down to the terms of the localism agenda, with all the limitations that this entails:

- Give people the power, knowledge and control which enables them to come together locally as an integrated community.

We will cut red tape, encourage transparency, and give away power to make it easier for neighbourhoods to take action. The Localism Act 2011 gives people the 'right to challenge' to take over local services, and a better chance to save local facilities threatened with closure. It is by coming together in this way that neighbourhoods become united and integrated. (DCLG 2012: 7–8)

This brings us to the fourth of the factors, participation and empowerment, but also points up the limits of how this participation is to unfold—being able to take over local services (but without state funding), or to save local facilities that are threatened with closure (again, often because of the withdrawal of state funding). People may, indeed, come together

here as a local community, but the motivation may be less to recognize and respect difference and more to plug the gaps of a shrinking state. Without an acknowledgement of and attention to the unequal social relations of local spaces, this can again reproduce those unequal power relations, so that those who have the social capital and 'sharp elbows' set the agenda for how local communities will come together and for what purposes. The third factor, social mobility, might open a door to considering those structural inequalities and, indeed, the document does make reference to 'the need to create opportunity for all and tackle disadvantage by promoting economic regeneration' (DCLG 2012: 8) But discussion of this is regularly juxtaposed with the need to tackle extremism, which dominates the discussion of the fifth factor, so that again the emphasis is on the problem of minorities who fail to integrate, rather than on the ways in which minoritized groups are structurally excluded, as in this passage:

We will encourage local areas to take the lead in building integration:

- We recognise that integration is a local issue, and requires a local response which brings together public, private and civic and philanthropic partners. Place is a key factor in integration. The long-term presence of a highly diverse population is generally an indicator of good integration and a strong sense that different people get on well. *But this can be undermined and even reversed by a range of factors, for example if groups within the local community work and socialise separately, if some sections of the local community face particular deprivation and adverse competition, or if extremist groups try to provoke tensions.* In such cases local areas must be able to recognise the risks and take action. [...]
- We strongly encourage the different local partners to work together to drive action and to learn from each other in promoting integration and challenging extremism. Local authorities are well placed to take a leading role working through existing partnerships with the police, other agencies and the business and voluntary sectors.

Local areas need to create opportunity for all and *tackle disadvantage by promoting economic regeneration.* *Alongside this they should ensure that*

*extremist narratives are robustly challenged, that groups and individuals promoting division and prejudice are not implicitly endorsed by engagement or use of public buildings and that early interventions take place in order to protect vulnerable individuals.* (DCLG 2012: 8, emphasis added)

Together, these factors produce an impoverished language of how communities might come together—since anti-racism is out of the frame, and the main obstacle to coming together is on the side of the minoritized, whether through their self-segregation or vulnerability to extremism, this remains a very one-sided process, in which a limited account of localism is pressed into service to recentre the ‘native’ and further problematize the minoritized, while also justifying the retrenchment of the welfare state. Whatever its limitations, the role of the central state in promoting equality and countering discrimination both signalled some commitment to addressing inequality along lines of race and religion, and provided a degree of legislative compulsion to comply for local government and the initiatives it supported, as well as the services it provides. As Kundnani has argued, despite its limits, the incorporation of some elements of anti-racism into multiculturalism at least created the possibility for a narrative that decouples race from immigration—so that the problems of being racialized as settled minority communities—being Black British or British Asian—was at least a story it was possible to tell (Kundnani 2007: 32). This becomes more and more difficult, when multiculturalism, immigration and anti-extremism are all lumped together, as they are in this Integration Strategy. The increasing reliance on private and commercial providers that is part of the localism agenda, as well as the reduction of local government budgets under austerity, risks undercutting those already fragile equality considerations and compliances.

What role does this leave for the central state in relation to integration, then? Given the culturalized vision of integration already established, there is the promotion of activities such as ‘the Big Lunch’, interfaith activities and music festivals. Where the document sees a political component to integration, it again posits the minoritized as the problem. So, in response to the threat of extremism, it sees a role for government in promoting ‘mainstream British liberal values’ (DCLG 2012: 9) and finds a place in its integration strategy for reforms to immigration and settlement rules:

*Reforms to immigration and settlement rules will strengthen the requirements on those who want to settle.* Those coming to the UK to work, study or marry are required to demonstrate an appropriate level of English, and those wishing to remain permanently or seek British citizenship are required to demonstrate their knowledge of language and life within the UK.

[...] As part of Home Office-led reforms to the settlement framework, look at how the settlement and citizenship process and ‘Life in the UK Test’ can *better promote an understanding not just of English language, but also of British life and of the values and principles which underlie British society.* (DCLG 2012: 11, emphasis added)

The tying together of integration and migration policies brings us back to a space of sameness. Difference is something that is imported from an elsewhere, and which threatens an already settled British way of life, values and principles. The role of the austere state here is to limit the amount of difference that can be allowed to penetrate the spaces of the local, and to ration its entitlements to those who will conform to the narrow terms of belonging on offer.

This final set of policy documents brings together all the main rhetorical devices, narrative strategies and plotlines examined throughout this book. Like the equality, ‘social justice’ and welfare reform strategies discussed in Chaps. 2, 3, 4, and 5, it appropriates a positive appeal to radical change, to turning around and turning away from a misguided past, but tethers these claims of progress to highly normative understandings of social difference. It also draws on this language of radical social change—here, of giving power back to the people through localism and the Big Society—in order to legitimate its austerity project of spending cuts and shrinking the state. It constructs, and then appeals to, its ideal reader as someone who already knows what is right and fair, and then gives them permission to disavow difference, here represented by those othered communities who fail to integrate into an imagined homogeneous common culture. As in the narrative on family migration in Chap. 6, this disavowal of difference involves rejecting any sense that belonging to the UK might be both the product of, and coexist with, transnational entanglements. While in relation to migration, this discursive work is done through an exclusionary model of ‘attachment’,

here, it is further consolidated through a narrow and static understanding of place. Finally, as throughout this book, the narrative relies on a framing of the reproductive as the source of crisis at a number of levels. The presence of minoritized communities is seen as a threat to the reproduction of an imagined settled and homogeneous British way of life. Those minoritized communities are seen as introducing gendered, religious and cultural intolerance into local places through their inappropriate practices of social reproduction. A too-big and interventionist state, through its misguided investment in 'state multiculturalism', has allowed this reproductive crisis to fester; the narrative resolution therefore includes rolling back that state and its engagement in social reproduction, returning as much of this work as it can to the gendered private sphere and the private sector. Together, these narrative strategies produce an austere political grammar of localism and integration, for which difference is always a problem that must be controlled and contained so that it cannot seriously unsettle these imagined places of sameness.

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# 8

## Postscript: November 2016

As I am completing this book in late 2016, many of those who played a major role in producing the narratives that are its subject are busy re-narrativizing the recent past. Theresa May, whose promise to ‘turn around equalities’ began this project, is now Prime Minister. Cameron and Osborne are gone on the back of the Brexit vote. Iain Duncan Smith, such a key player in the central narrative of welfare dependency, now presents his resignation in 2015 as a protest against the cuts he did so much to justify. Whatever his motivations, his resignation followed the eruption of one of the first instances of the austerity narrative beginning to ‘eat itself’, when the new Conservative majority government had to backtrack on its plans to cut in-work tax credits as part of the ‘welfare reform’ agenda. After years of casting the benefit recipient as work-shy, here, the perception that those who ‘worked hard and did the right thing’ were also being made to suffer would appear to have been too much for the narrative to bear (although £3 billion in cuts to in-work benefits are still set to go ahead under the roll-out of Universal Credit, along with punishing new limits on overall benefits). May’s new government claims to be less committed to pushing through further cuts to public spending, and promises to roll back some of the most contested components of the

austerity agenda, including the continuous reassessment of people with severe, long-term health conditions under the Work Capability Assessment programme. The austerity narrative's repeated calls to retract an overweening central state would seem to be being replaced with a story about the 'good government can do' (May 2016b), and a renewed commitment to 'social justice'. It's worth looking more closely at the emerging narrative of the May government, to see whether it really does depart from the Cameron years, and to what degree it stays within the terms of the political grammar of austerity examined in the preceding chapters.

In her first speech as Prime Minister, standing outside the door of No. 10 Downing Street, Theresa May claimed to be building on David Cameron's 'true legacy' of a one-nation government committed to social justice (May 2016a). Referencing the introduction of same-sex marriage as a key example of this, May then goes on to outline the 'burning injustices' she aims to address:

That means fighting against the burning injustice that, if you're born poor, you will die on average 9 years earlier than others.

If you're black, you're treated more harshly by the criminal justice system than if you're white.

If you're a white, working-class boy, you're less likely than anybody else in Britain to go to university.

If you're at a state school, you're less likely to reach the top professions than if you're educated privately.

If you're a woman, you will earn less than a man. If you suffer from mental health problems, there's not enough help to hand.

If you're young, you'll find it harder than ever before to own your own home. (May 2016a)

Class, race, gender, age, disability—here, May positions herself as champion in the fight against the collective inequalities that, as Home Secretary and Equalities Minister, she did so much to undermine, as we saw in Chap. 2. Is this a move away from the diminished and neutralized equalities strategy she supported, in which 'protected characteristics' are mentioned but then individualized and constrained within a neo-liberal

framing of individual opportunity? Will her version of ‘social justice’ be any more attentive to structural inequalities than Iain Duncan Smith’s social justice strategy explored in Chap. 5? In fact, this initial attention to collective differences is quickly left behind, as in the Equality Strategy she introduced six years earlier, to turn to her main focus of narrative address, the ‘just-managing family’:

But the mission to make Britain a country that works for everyone means more than fighting these injustices. If you’re from an ordinary working class family, life is much harder than many people in Westminster realise. You have a job but you don’t always have job security. You have your own home, but you worry about paying a mortgage. You can just about manage but you worry about the cost of living and getting your kids into a good school.

If you’re one of those families, if you’re just managing, I want to address you directly.

I know you’re working around the clock, I know you’re doing your best, and I know that sometimes life can be a struggle. The government I lead will be driven not by the interests of the privileged few, but by yours. (May 2016a)

Is the ‘just-managing family’ any different from the hard-working family who does the right thing that underpins the austerity narrative, and is ‘a country that works for everyone’ a vision that moves away from the relentless and often brutal dividing practices of the policies examined in this book? To explore this more fully, we need to turn to May’s more extended narrative developed in her speech at the 2016 Autumn Conservative Party Conference. Here, with a much repeated refrain that ‘change has got to come’ (May 2016b), May offers a crisis-resolution account that claims to be different from that elaborated in the Coalition years, but which nevertheless reiterates much of its narrative logic. The sub-titles of her speech—The New Centre Ground, Britain’s Quiet Revolution, Believing in the Good Government Can Do, An Economy/Society/Country/Democracy that Works for Everyone, and so on—as well as the repeated commitment to fairness would seem to offer a change of direction but, as I hope I have shown throughout this book, positive

appeals to radical change, to fairness and to a particular understanding of the common good have been firmly recuperated into the neo-liberal logic of the austerity project.

Where is the crisis for May, and what is its resolution? And, most importantly for our purposes, how is difference positioned in her account? Speaking only a few months after the EU referendum result that brought her to power, after a campaign that left the country deeply divided and that gave permission to ever-more extreme and hateful expressions of anti-migrant, racist and narrow nationalist sentiments, May's narrative nevertheless refuses to engage with that crisis of division and, instead, continues to mobilize those anti-difference sentiments in framing her solution. Calling the referendum Britain's 'quiet revolution', she casts it as an uprising of 'the people' against the privileged few, aiming to speak for the 'ordinary, working class families' who suffered most from the financial crash. As she said:

For the referendum was not just a vote to withdraw from the EU. It was about something broader – something that the European Union had come to represent. It was about a sense – deep, profound and let's face it often justified – that many people have today that the world works well for a privileged few [...]

And the roots of the revolution run deep. Because it wasn't the wealthy who made the biggest sacrifices after the financial crash, but ordinary, working class families. And if you're one of those people who lost their job, who stayed in work but on reduced hours, took a pay cut as household bills rocketed, *or – and I know a lot of people don't like to admit this – someone who finds themselves out of work or on lower wages because of low-skilled immigration, life simply doesn't seem fair.* It feels like your dreams have been sacrificed in the service of others. So change has got to come. (May 2016b, emphasis added)

What we need to notice here is how a story that starts with something of a critique of the privileged few quickly turns its attention to the failure to control migration. As we saw in Chap. 6, May here repeats the argument elaborated in the Coalition years that casts the migrant as a threat to the reproduction of social order. What she adds to this account now is a critique of 'global elites' on behalf of 'the people', but

that critique is always marked by a concern that those elites are complicit in encouraging migration. May stands on the side of the people, of ordinary working-class families, against the privileged few, in large part *because* she sees the privileged as not sufficiently anti-migration. The difference that migration represents is still seen as central to the crisis she sets out to resolve:

Because if we don't respond – if we don't take this opportunity to deliver the change people want – resentments will grow. Divisions will become entrenched. And that would be a disaster for Britain. Because the lesson of Britain is that we are a country built on the bonds of *family, community, citizenship*. Of strong institutions and a strong society. The country of my parents who instilled in me a sense of public service and of public servants everywhere *who want to give something back*. The parent who works hard all week but takes time out to coach the kids' football team at the weekend. *The local family business in my constituency that's been serving the community for more than 50 years*.

Now don't get me wrong. We applaud success. We want people to get on. But we also value something else: the spirit of citizenship. That spirit that means you respect the bonds and obligations that make our society work. That means a commitment to the men and women who live around you, who work for you, who buy the goods and services you sell. *That spirit that means recognising the social contract that says you train up local young people before you take on cheap labour from overseas*. That spirit that means you do as others do, and pay your fair share of tax. But today, too many people in positions of power behave as though they have *more in common with international elites* than with the people down the road, the people they employ, the people they pass in the street.

*But if you believe you're a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere. You don't understand what the very word 'citizenship' means.* (May 2016b, emphasis added)

In this extended passage, May draws together many of the strands that have been my focus throughout the chapters of this book. There is the evocation of community as a space of sameness and permanence explored in Chap. 7—the local family business that has been around for more than 50 years, the people around you who all know and play by the same rules, sustained by a romanticized view of the normative family. There is the

neo-liberal framing of citizenship, first, as primarily about what you put in, what you give back, with no mention of the entitlement to social support that citizenship might also entail, bringing us back to the model of citizenship centred on an obligation to free oneself from requiring social support, or from acknowledging the mutuality of interdependence, with all its classed, racialized, gendered and ableist underpinnings. This view of the ideal citizen animates many of the arguments examined in Chaps. 3, 4, and 5 on welfare reform, disability benefits and the troubled family. Second, citizenship is defined forcefully against the outside world—if you believe you're a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere—May's explicit and ostensible target here may be the global elites who have profited from globalization and transnational mobility but, as we have seen in Chap. 6, the same preoccupation with proving one's attachment to Britain in exclusionary terms underpinned the migration policy for which she was responsible throughout the Coalition years. Here, the migrant is reduced again to 'cheap labour from overseas', determinedly excluded from the social contract, and the transnational connections that mark everyday life, and not just for 'global elites', are forcefully rejected. In both senses, then, May's vision of citizenship sits very comfortably with the extension of the range of remedial citizens, of citizens on permanent probation, that we saw being constituted in policy narratives around welfare reform, disability, the troubled family, integration and family migration.

Whether May is tougher on the privileged few who escaped the consequences of austerity remains to be seen. What is more certain is that an anti-migrant narrative will be central to her account of crisis and resolution, and that her stance on the side of 'ordinary working class people' brings with it a particular and pointed definition of their values. As she says in her account of 'the way a lot of politicians and commentators talk about the public':

They find your patriotism distasteful, your concerns about immigration parochial, your views about crime illiberal, your attachment to your job security inconvenient. They find the fact that more than seventeen million voters decided to leave the European Union simply bewildering. (May 2016b)



I would suggest that what is happening in this post-referendum moment, and what May is enacting in this speech, is that the narrow and exclusionary vision of citizenship produced over the years of austerity through policy discourse is now being identified as belonging to, and emanating from, those that the narrative has worked so hard to produce as objects of its address. What is erased here is the rhetorical work that precedes and leads up to this moment. The relentless repetition of address to ‘hard working families’—in May’s terms ‘Supporting those who do the right thing, who make a contribution. Helping those who give something back’ (May 2016b); the repeated definition of this ideal listener against a series of gendered, racialized and disabled remedial citizens who need to be taken in hand and disciplined. Instead, this disavowal of difference is now resited as the voice of ‘the people’. Narrating the referendum result in this way makes contesting the logic of austerity even more difficult because, having done the hard work of inviting identification with its point of view, the architects of the austerity narrative can now stand back and present the object of their construction as the will of the people that must be listened to.

May sees no contradiction between her commitment, in her conference speech, to ‘address racial disparities’ and other ‘burning injustices’ (May 2016b), and her weakening of the already modest instruments to combat racism in the ‘turning around’ of equalities policy that she implemented in her time as Home Secretary and Equalities Minister, as we saw in Chap. 2, nor of her historical and continued mobilization of a demonizing language in relation to migrants. But having seen how the language of fairness, social justice and equality has been turned around in the austerity narrative in order to privilege sameness over difference, we have good reason to be suspicious of how such promises to address collective disadvantage will be used.

For feminists, as we have seen throughout this book, austerity narratives present a number of specific challenges. While gender was rarely explicitly targeted in most of the policies examined here, the mobilization of normative gender sits just barely below the surface in all of them. Claims of an already-established commitment to gender equality are used instrumentally in the definition of community and belonging in order to further marginalize minoritized groups. At the same time, the arguments

for reform of the benefits system and taking ‘troubled families’ in hand reinstate a very traditional view of the normative family and marriage, while the overall austerity project of shrinking the welfare state expects that women will take up the slack in the form of the unpaid labour of care. Perhaps more fundamentally, and certainly more insidiously, we have seen how the gendered work of social reproduction is repeatedly constituted as an excess that is too much for the neo-liberal model of the state and its subject-citizens to bear. This reproductive excess haunts the narratives on welfare reform, on troubled families, on family migration and integration. The marginalization of the socially necessary work of care and the disavowal of our social *interdependence* in the articulation of the subject-citizen of austerity makes it a deeply gendered project at both material and discursive levels. Feminists must be suspicious of these uses of gender and, more than ever, must rely on an intersectional understanding of how gender difference is mobilized and entangled with the politics of disavowing other forms of difference.

Theresa May might claim to be inhabiting a ‘new centre ground’ but what I have argued throughout this book is that this ground has already been shifted dangerously to a place where toxic attitudes towards all manner of differences are given permission to flourish, in the name of ‘doing the right thing’. The specific policies narrated in the chapters of this book may well change. But the discursive effects of the stories through which they were justified remain, and would appear to be consolidating even further in the political culture of a post-Brexit Britain and in a wider world that has seen the election of Donald Trump in the USA and a continued rise of the Far Right across Europe—a world in which much of the disaffection with the material effects of austerity appears to remain captured by austerity’s own terms of engagement. Indeed, while my focus has been on UK politics throughout this book, the narratives underpinning contemporary politics in the USA, Europe and beyond show many troubling parallels. I hope that, in paying careful attention to the narrative techniques through which those terms of engagement have been produced in the British context, this book has contributed some resources to the work that must be undertaken transnationally to unsettle the logic of the political grammar of austerity.

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# Index

## NUMBERS AND SYMBOLS

*21st Century Welfare*, 65

## A

abjection, 12, 27, 58, 72, 122, 124,  
135, 155

affect

narrative affect, 10, 27, 73, 106,  
145

Ahmed, Sara, 3, 10, 32, 41, 42,  
44, 50

amenability, 11, 14, 31, 107

Anderson, Bridget, 149, 164,  
166

anti-racism, 191, 194, 198

arranged marriage, 158–60

ATOS, 84, 86

attachment, 11, 22, 142, 144,  
146, 151–5, 199, 208

austerity, 3–5, 12, 13, 16–18, 21, 35,  
50, 53, 114, 146, 164, 166,  
199, 203, 205, 209, 210  
and the state, 169, 197–9

## B

Baraitser, Lisa, 129

Battersby, Christine, 129

benefit scrounger, 12, 20, 61,  
83–108, 148

Berlant, Lauren, 10, 106

Bhattacharyya, Gargi, 5, 12, 13,  
16–18, 35, 51, 66, 70, 79,  
137, 164, 166

Big Society, 22, 169–200

bordering practices, 22, 161, 164,  
166

Bradshaw, Jonathan, 137

Brah, Avtar, 4, 171, 192

- Briant, Emma, 84  
 BritCits, 146  
 Broken Britain, 111, 124  
 Brown, Wendy, 15
- C**
- Cameron, David, 1–3, 13, 72, 75, 123–7, 135, 173–6, 186–90, 192, 203, 204  
 Centre for Social Justice, 20, 53, 72, 87–90, 111, 116, 120, 130  
 child poverty, 76, 77, 117  
 citizenship, 66, 68, 90, 125, 173, 174, 185, 199, 207–9  
   neo-liberal citizen, 20, 22, 77, 122, 146, 149, 166  
   remedial citizens, 22, 126, 132, 136, 137, 166, 208, 209  
 Clark, Tom, 56  
 Clarke, John, 5, 13, 14  
 common good, 23, 174, 175, 179, 183, 184, 186, 196, 206  
 common values, 182, 183, 192  
 community cohesion, 10, 158, 171, 179–81, 186, 191, 192  
 compulsory able-bodiedness, 21, 106, 107  
 consent, 10–13, 20, 27, 53–80, 85, 90, 157  
 crisis, 11, 57, 59, 78, 79, 185  
   financial crisis, 35, 57  
 Crossley, Stephen, 122, 125
- D**
- D'Aoust, Anne-Marie, 144  
 De Genova, Nicholas, 161
- diaspora space, 171, 192  
 disability, 61, 85, 92  
   social model of disability, 16, 21, 83, 86, 89, 93, 98, 103, 104, 107  
 Disability Living Allowance, 87, 88, 92  
 disability policy, 20, 86, 98, 108  
 Duncan Smith, Iain, 1, 34, 35, 53–5, 57–60, 65, 71, 78, 85, 87, 92, 111, 115, 116, 118, 143, 144, 154, 203, 205
- E**
- Elson, Diane, 6, 17, 18, 170  
 embodiment, 103, 106–8  
 entitlement, 5, 11, 16, 18, 20, 21, 33, 35, 51, 57, 65, 66, 79, 97, 108, 164, 166, 208  
 Equalities Review 2007, 14  
 equality, 3, 16, 37, 50, 58, 178, 180, 193, 198, 209  
 Equality Act 2006, 38  
 Equality Act 2010, 14, 19, 28, 29, 45, 46  
 Equality and Human Rights Commission, 14, 19, 27, 29, 36  
   General Duty, 36, 37  
   Good Relations Duty, 38  
 equality policy, 19, 27, 28, 35, 186  
 Equality Strategy 2010, 19, 27, 29–35, 205  
 Essed, Philomena, 171  
 European Convention on Human Rights, 143, 144



## F

fairness, 3, 13–15, 17, 28, 31, 35,  
57, 58, 63, 64, 97, 154, 173,  
205, 209

family, 74, 79, 111, 119, 137, 151,  
158, 205

family breakdown, 53, 59, 60,  
115, 117–21

hard working families, 56, 112,  
209

just-managing family, 205

migrant family, 22, 145, 148,  
152, 155, 166

normative family, 20, 60, 72, 75,  
79, 118, 121, 128, 131,  
134–6, 138, 207

right to a family life, 22, 141,  
156, 165

transnational family, 142

financial crisis, 5, 6

forced marriage, 151, 157, 158, 163,  
188

*Fulfilling Potential*, 20, 98–108

## G

Garthwaite, Kelly, 84

gender, 17, 18, 20, 72, 74, 75, 79,  
137

gendered violence, 112

gender equality, 5, 189

normative gender, 21, 73, 74, 79,  
112, 128, 133, 209

gendered violence, 112, 122, 133

gender equality, 23, 161, 170

Gill, Kamaljeet, 177, 178

Gilroy, Paul, 179

global care chains, 150

Goodhart, David, 179, 180, 186

Goodley, Dan, 107

governmentality, 17, 21, 83, 122

Grieve, Dominic, 180–2, 184–6,  
192

Griffin, Penny, 6

Griffith, Phoebe, 171

Grover, Chris, 85, 90

## H

Hancock, Lynn, 172

Haraway, Donna, 129

Haritaworn, Jun, 4

Hayden, Carol, 122, 123, 125

Heath, Anthony, 56

Hemmings, 3, 9–11

Hochschild, Arlie, 17, 150

Houston, Donald, 86

human rights, 36, 37, 145, 157,  
164–6

## I

identity politics, 14, 31, 180, 181

Inkle, Kay, 107

Institute for Public Policy Research,  
56

integration, 22, 142, 147, 148, 152,  
169–72, 178–80, 185, 186,  
189, 190, 192, 193, 199

intersectionality, 4, 23, 170, 189

## J

James, Malcolm, 171

Jenkins, Craig, 122, 123, 125

Jensen, Tracey, 60

## K

Kapoor, Nisha, 179, 191  
Kundnani, Arun, 179, 191, 198

## L

Lentin, Alana, 183  
Levitas, Ruth, 118, 125, 128, 170,  
173, 176, 177  
Lindsay, Colin, 86  
Listening to Troubled Families, 21,  
112, 128  
localism, 22, 114, 169, 172–8, 192,  
193  
Lonergan, Gwyneth, 17

## M

Main, Gill, 137  
Mason, David, 15, 70  
Massey, Doreen, 171, 178, 179, 195  
May, Theresa, 1, 3, 24, 27, 29, 30,  
32–4, 37, 41, 46, 47, 141,  
142, 145, 153, 164, 203–10  
McCarvill, Phil, 177  
McRuer, Robert, 106, 107  
Meekosha, Helen, 84, 85, 90, 93, 108  
Migrants Rights Network, 146  
migration, 22, 141, 148, 151, 181,  
199, 206, 208  
Mitchell, David, 90, 91, 106, 107  
Montgomerie, Johnna, 122, 127,  
136  
Mooney, Gerry, 172  
Morris, Jenny, 85, 89, 94, 103  
multiculturalism, 158, 171, 182–4,  
187, 188, 190–2, 194, 198,  
200

## N

narrative  
narrative address, 8, 10, 20, 33,  
59, 68–72, 75, 76, 79, 88,  
108, 187, 205, 209  
narrative affect, 8–10  
narrative arc, 8, 20, 22, 27, 31,  
47, 102, 141  
narrative chronology, 8, 10, 19,  
27, 30  
narrative crisis and resolution, 8,  
11, 19–21, 27, 31, 59, 61, 83,  
95, 108, 113, 134, 145, 170,  
200, 205, 208  
narrative disavowal, 11, 14, 27,  
33, 58, 77, 107, 113, 189,  
199  
narrative order, 108, 113–15, 129  
narrative analysis, 6, 7, 19, 27  
Neal, Sarah, 172  
neo-liberalism, 4, 5, 12, 16, 18, 28,  
35, 66, 79, 90, 206  
neo-liberal citizenship, 151  
neo-liberal subject, 13–15, 33, 50,  
85, 106, 132  
New Labour, 11, 14, 28, 85, 90,  
112, 113, 117, 119, 125, 158,  
179, 180, 191  
Newman, Janet, 5, 13, 14

O

Obolenskaya, P., 117  
Osborne, George, 70, 92

P

Pearson, Ruth, 6, 17, 18, 170

Personal Independence Payment, 55,  
91, 94–8

Philo, Gregory, 84

Phoenix, Ann, 4

Piggott, Linda, 85, 90

political grammar, 3, 9, 21, 27, 68,  
108, 180, 200, 204, 210

Public Sector Equality Duty, 19, 28,  
29, 45–51

## R

race, 14, 29, 39, 40, 177, 182, 191,  
194, 198

racialization, 16

racialization, 16, 17, 23, 39, 161,  
169, 170, 192, 198

racism, 5, 14, 16, 124, 158, 171,  
183, 188, 192, 193, 209

Ratcliffe, Peter, 179

Red Tape Challenge, 19, 28, 29,  
46, 47

reproductive, the, 16–18, 20–2, 73,  
77–9, 108, 112, 128, 129, 136,  
142, 144, 150, 166, 170, 200  
reproductive excess, 20, 78, 108,  
155, 166, 210

Respect Agenda, 112

Ridge, Tess, 117

Riessman, Catherine, 7–9

Roulstone, Alan, 107

Runnymede Trust, 36, 39, 180–2,  
184, 185, 192, 194

## S

Sachrajda, Alice, 171

sameness, 23, 169–200, 207, 209

Scott, Joan, 15

*Securing our Border, Controlling  
Migration, Family Migration,*  
22, 146

Shakespeare, Tom, 107

sham marriage, 22, 143, 144, 146,  
156–8, 162, 163

Schildrick, Margrit, 106, 107

Schildrick, Tracey, 77

Sirriyeh, Alia, 146, 158

Snyder, Sharon, 90, 91, 106, 107

social difference, 3, 15, 20, 32, 199

social justice, 3, 13, 21, 34, 60, 72,  
112, 113, 116, 122, 204, 205,  
209

Transforming Lives, 113

Social Justice Strategy, 21, 111

social reproduction, 17, 18, 75,  
137, 144, 149, 155, 166,  
170, 200, 210. *See also*

reproductive, the

Soldatic, Karen, 84, 85, 90, 93, 108

Stewart, Kitty, 117

stigmatisation, 14, 58, 64, 73, 79

Sveinsson, Kjartan, 177, 178

## T

Tepe-Belfrage, Daniela, 122, 127,  
136

transnational, 4, 5, 142, 146, 147,  
153, 155, 171, 179, 187, 188,  
199, 208, 210

transnational family, 166

Troubled Families, 21, 34, 78, 111,  
116, 122–5, 128, 135, 137

Tyler, Imogen, 12, 14, 58, 60, 72,  
73, 112, 129

U

underclass, 112, 120  
Universal Credit, 20, 55, 59, 67–9,  
78, 90–2, 203

V

van Dijk, Teun, 124, 183

W

Wacquant, Loic, 66, 68, 70–2  
Watson, Nick, 84  
Wearing, Sadie, 107  
welfare  
welfare dependency, 20, 22, 53,  
57, 59, 78, 87, 112, 115,  
117

welfare reform, 20, 34, 53–80,  
99, 101, 114, 203  
welfare state, 5, 17, 66, 72, 77, 79, 85,  
111, 114, 143, 169, 176, 198, 210  
Wiggan, Jay, 59  
Williams, Fiona, 17, 150  
work-ability, 84, 85, 90, 91, 107  
Work Capability Assessment, 84, 86,  
103, 204  
worklessness, 53, 54, 57, 59–61, 66,  
67, 71, 73, 77, 78, 89, 112,  
115, 116, 125  
Wray, Charlotte, 149

Y

Young, Iris Marion, 181, 183  
Yuval-Davis, Nira, 129