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W E L F A R E

W O R D S

**CRITICAL SOCIAL WORK
& SOCIAL POLICY**

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

In late 2016, the Irish Health Services Executive (HSE) issued a memo advising nursing staff to remove 'trespassing' patients who refused to surrender their beds from overcrowded and crisis-ridden hospitals (Cullen, 2016). The movement from 'patient' to 'trespasser' provided an example of not only a discursive shift, in that HSE legal advisors stated that nurses could deploy 'minimum force' in such instances to remove a 'trespasser' refusing to leave a bed once deemed clinically well enough to do so. The nursing unions refused to comply with this new protocol, there was public consternation and the senior managers were compelled to apologise for the controversial memo.

The incident highlights the significance of the use of words within social and health care and the differing practices that they often seek to trigger, promote and embed. This book will specifically examine what I am choosing to call 'welfare words'. Stretching beyond issues simply relating to income maintenance, these are 'welfare dependency', 'underclass', 'social exclusion', 'early intervention', 'resilience', 'care' and 'adoption'[1]. This project is partly rooted in a course I have taught for a number of years and my perspective has been enhanced by having the opportunity to engage with students located in social work, sociology, social policy and politics. Some of the words to be explored are also commonplace on a range of other courses, including those concerned with criminal justice, urban policy, education, health and health promotion etc. As well as the general reader, I hope *Welfare Words* might also attract final year undergraduate and postgraduate students in a range of other spheres and disciplines. In this context, I include a short 'Further Reading' section at the culmination of the first nine chapters. Influenced by my conversation-driven pedagogy, I also insert a series of 'Reflection and Talk Boxes' which, across nine chapters, have twenty questions. The aim of this device (which can be skipped if it is not to the taste of particular readers) is to stimulate critical conversations and debates on key facets of the preceding chapter in class and, for some readers, in fieldwork or workplace settings.

Welfare Words will articulate and discuss how the specific words and phrases analysed may *fit* within the wider economic and cultural patterning so riven with gross social inequalities and complex forms of social marginality. Thinking more deeply, critically and *politically* about the incessant deployment of particular words within prevailing discourses and daily social work encounters may also lead to questioning what such words 'assume about a social totality or infrastructure, or the presumed characteristics of social actors' (Barrett, 1992: 202). Far from being an exercise in 'political correctness', the aspiration will be to delve deeper into how power relations operate through the language and culture of neoliberal capitalism (Philpot, 1999; Fairclough, 2003).

WELFARE WORDS, CRITICAL SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL POLICY

Words change meaning over time and are never encountered in isolation. Our engagement with words invariably occurs 'within the flows of our socio-cultural practices' with meaning 'at least in part tied to the social world we inhabit' (Grimwood, 2016: 15). Yet, as Noel Timms, a psychiatric social worker and author, observed in the late 1960s, it is 'surprising' that his profession, 'largely dependent on language, should have paid so little attention to words and what it means to speak a language' (in Gregory and Holloway, 2005: 38). The usage of words shapes the way the profession communicates to itself, how it coalesces, marks out and sustains a distinctive rationality. Through language, social work is able to construct and maintain the domain with words serving as the 'glue' helping it to stick into place. For example, keywords (such as 'assessment', 'risk' and 'supervision') are integral to the training of social workers who learn to *think* within the conceptual parameters of the profession and to *talk the talk* (see also Wilson, 2016). This mimetic dimension – learning the *right* language, perceptions and dispositions – contributes to producing a certain social work identity and *style* (Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002). This is part of the process Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) refers to as attaining the 'feel for the game'. The game is acquired through experience and the 'good player, who is so to speak the game incarnate, does at every moment what the game requires' (Bourdieu, 1994: 63). This 'feel' is partly inculcated through prevailing names and descriptions helping to constitute the dominant forms of reasoning which become, in time, 'turned into second nature' (Bourdieu, 1994: 65).

This can also be connected to the ways in which people engaging with social workers are classified. Bowker and Star (1999: 10) maintain that a 'classification system' is a 'set of boxes (metaphorical or literal) into which things can be put to then do some kind of work – bureaucratic or knowledge production'. Such systems have, of course, been central to social work since its inception (Woodroofe, 1962). In the past, this was reflected in the naming practices and types of descriptive language used in depicting and 'fixing' a person in a 'case' file (Foucault, 1991 [1977]).

In more recent times, this form of activity is more likely to be undertaken using electronic templates (Garrett, 2005).

For social work to be operational, some forms of categorisation are inevitable if the day-to-day work is to be rendered *doable*. Yet the verbal categories that social workers use can promote 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 2000; see also Chapter 2). 'Labels', as Schram (1995: 23) avows, 'operate as sources of power that serve to frame identities and interests. They predispose actors to treat the subjects in question in certain ways.' For example, the words 'client' or 'service user' are apt to connote and convey vague, even suppressed, notions of inferior, tainted or spoiled personhood. Moreover, there may be instances when categories and classifications used by practitioners – often situated within a matrix of ideas associated with particular forms of ostensibly 'scientific' and neutral 'expertise' – can result in oppressive ramifications for those targeted for intervention (Mayes and Horwitz, 2005). An example of how this process can occur is reflected in historical responses to 'unmarried mothers' in Ireland and elsewhere (Garrett, 2015a, 2017). Experts, often straddling the boundaries between the applied social sciences and clerical or pastoral guidance, performed vital 'definitional labour' (Goffman, 1971 [1959]) and charted what was deemed to be the most appropriate forms of intervention. Felix Biestek (1957: 25), an American Jesuit and one of the primary definers of what constituted the philosophical foundation for social work, observed that caseworkers 'have differed in their evaluation of the capacity of "unmarried mothers", as a group, to make sound decisions. Some feel that unmarried mothers are so damaged emotionally that they are incapable of arriving at a good decision themselves' (see also Shahid and Jha, 2014).

Language is not simply the means by which the social work task is 'described and constructed in different ways at different historical junctures', it is also the 'cornerstone of intervention, the lifeline through which all communication between individuals engaged in the process takes place' (Gregory and Holloway, 2005: 49). Given the increasing privatisation of social work services, practitioners' communication skills and ability to use the *appropriate* language is also a commodity and source of potential profit for businesses (Garrett, 2010).

Gregory and Holloway (2005) chart the history of social work in England and identify how the profession has evolved discursively. For example, in the early 1950s the terminology used to describe the subjects of intervention included 'poor', 'needy',' imbecile', 'problem family' and 'crippled family' (Gregory and Holloway, 2005: 42). As the decade moved on, however, the emphasis on a more clinical orientation and the influence of psychodynamic approaches gave rise to shifting characterizations such as the 'person', the 'client' (Gregory and Holloway, 2005: 42). Somewhat surprisingly, military metaphors – such as officers and duty – have continued to symbolically represent aspects of social workers' day-to-day engagement with the users of services (Beckett, 2003; see also Newberry-Koroluk, 2014). Chris Beckett (2003) proposes that the 'spoken language' of social work is a combination

flowing from the dynamic interplay of three identifiable types: the 'sacred language' (reflected in the aspirational language embedded in the profession's codes of ethics and so on); the 'official language' (revealed in the language of the bureaucracy); the 'colloquial' language (used by practitioners in the everyday, more informal interactions with one another).

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

Mindful as to how language is one of the key mediums through which ideology is generated and potentially transformed, Stuart Hall (1996: 27) stresses that it is important to analyse the 'concepts and the languages of practical thought which stabilise a particular form of power and domination; or which reconcile and accommodate the mass of the people to their subordinate place in the social formation'. For example, in terms of workplaces, there have been sustained cultural and discursive interventions aimed at cajoling *and* coercing workers into altering their values and remaking their identities in ways more conducive to the market. This development has been particularly apparent within public services, such as state social work. Central to the ideological project of neoliberalism, in fact, are strategies to inculcate 'employees into new ways of working and new identities corresponding to them, partly through attempts to get them to not only use but "own" new discourses' (Fairclough, 2003: 20). Such discourses are apt to focus on, and promote a certain idea as to how – to use one of Raymond Williams' own keywords – a 'modern' service should be assembled and what core competencies and attributes compliant staff should possess and exhibit (see also Williams, 1983: 208; Garrett, 2008).

WELFARE WORDS AND KEYWORDS

Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society by Raymond Williams (1921–1988) is one of the main inspirations for this book. Initially published in 1976, Williams' 'slim, strangely addictive' volume included 110 'micro essays' on words that he

perceived as significant in the mid-1970s and into the following decade (Beckett, 2014: 19). These included, for example, charity, communication, community, consumer, family, modern, society, technology, unemployment, welfare and work. These represented, for him, 'binding' words, 'significant, indicative words in certain forms of thought' (Williams, 1983: 15). Hence, they functioned, singularly and collectively, as the 'linguistic-ideological hubs of his time' (Holborow, 2015: 71; see also Fritsch et al., 2016a). The book was subsequently republished, during the period of the Thatcher governments (1979–1990), with an additional 21 words being added in 1983 (Williams, 1983). In 2014, a third edition was published coinciding with the *Keywords: Art, Culture and Society in 1980s Britain* exhibition at the Tate Gallery.

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

This focus on keywords is 'traceable back to late nineteenth-century semantics' (Durant, 2006: 5), but Williams injected a quizzical leftist approach into his own project (see also Williams, 1973; Eagleton, 1976; Ferrara, 1989; Hall, 1989). As a Marxist, he also voiced 'reservations about semantic and lexicographical work as a force for change' (Durant, 2006: 16–17). Whilst Williams' work was foundational to the field of 'cultural studies', he remained a cultural *materialist* in that he believed meaningful social and economic change could never be prompted by words alone. This position anticipates, in some sense, later comments by Bourdieu (2000: 2), who chides those placing 'excessive confidence in the power of language'. For the French sociologist, this was a 'typical illusion' of many contemporary academics who regarded an 'academic commentary as a political act or the critique of texts as a feat of resistance, and experience revolutions in the order of words as radical revolutions in the order of things' (Bourdieu, 2000: 2).

Williams acknowledged, however, the power of ideas and culture in consolidating, or rendering more vulnerable to change, a given social order. Expressed somewhat

differently, it would be wrong to reduce issues relating to social change to either materialist accounts laying emphasis on structures and the brute forces of history or to entirely idealist explanations stressing the determining importance of ideas, agency and intentions.

'CH-CH-CH-CH-CHANGES': KEYWORDS NOW

Ch-ch-ch-ch-changes
(Turn and face the strange)
Ch-ch-changes

(David Bowie, 1971)

David Bowie's single 'Changes', along with the first edition of Williams' book, appeared in the 1970s. Since then, the economic, political and cultural context has been radically transformed. In 1976, when *Keywords* was initially published, Abba enjoyed weeks at the 'top of the charts' with their shimmering pop classic 'Dancing Queen'. However, a note of cultural discord was struck, in October of that year, when The Damned released what is often regarded as the first 'punk rock' single, 'New Rose'. In December, The Sex Pistols infamously scattered swearwords on Bill Grundy's live television programme and in doing so drew further attention to their new single, 'Anarchy in the UK', released the previous week. In 1976 Harold Wilson unexpectedly resigned as prime minister and was succeeded by James Callaghan. For the first half of the year a 'Cod War', involving British and Icelandic ships, took place. During the summer, the country experienced a heat wave which contributed to the worst drought since the early eighteenth century. Following an upsurge in violence, 'direct rule' was imposed on Northern Ireland in March. The year ended with the Chancellor, Denis Healey, announcing he had negotiated a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on condition that billions of pounds were cut from the public expenditure budget (Beckett, 2009).

In geopolitical terms, since the 1970s, the implosion of the USSR and the liquidation of degenerated workers' states in other parts of the 'Eastern Bloc' have contributed to the global solidification of capitalism (Becker, 2016). In China, beginning in the late 1990s, sectors associated with safeguarding the 'quality of life of the common people – housing, health, education – became increasingly marketized' (Ngai, 2016: 14). In the West, and elsewhere, there have been substantial sociological transformations connected to changing ideas and practices relating to the family, gender roles, sexualities and ethnicities (Lawler, 2014; Moran, 2015). The Apple Corporation was only founded in 1976 with Microsoft having been established the previous year. Since this time there has been a rapid expansion in information and communication technology (ICT) with the internet and various forms of social media becoming pervasively influential (see also Tarnoff, 2016). Much of this was

unimaginable in the 1970s and these are some of the developments which Tony Bennett and his colleagues endeavoured to encompass in a collection called *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Bennett et al., 2005).

Since the mid-1970s, and an earlier round of austerity measures, neoliberal economics and wider cultural processes of neoliberalisation have been dominant. Although publicly 'championed by Thatcher and Reagan, it was applied only gradually and unevenly in the First World. In the Third, by contrast, neoliberalization was imposed at the gunpoint of debt, as an enforced program of "social adjustment" which overturned all the central tenets of developmentalism and compelled postcolonial states to divest their assets, open their markets, and slash social spending' (Fraser, 2013: 218). However, these processes gradually displaced the 'embedded liberalism' which had been widespread across much of Western Europe since the end of the Second World War. During this period, 'market processes and entrepreneurial and corporate activities were surrounded by a web of social and political constraints and a regulatory environment that sometimes restrained … economic and industrial strategy' (Harvey, 2005: 11).

The word neoliberalism is frequently used in a casual way as 'shorthand for a prevailing dystopian zeitgeist' (Venugopal, 2015: 168). However, underpinning this exploration of welfare words is an understanding that neoliberalism is an historically specific form of capital accumulation endeavouring to engineer a 'counter-revolution against welfare capitalism' (Fairclough and Graham, 2002: 221). Relatedly, we are *witnessing*, *feeling* and *experiencing* the wholesale 'extension of a basic feature of capitalist power relations present from the beginning: class domination' (Fleming, 2015: 29). Reflecting neoliberalism's ascendancy as a financial and cultural force, 'social activity and exchange becomes judged on their degree of conformity to market culture' with 'business thinking migrating to all social activities' (Holborow, 2015: 34, 35). Within social work in Ireland, for example, this tendency is discursively reflected in practitioners being compelled to use a 'business model' electronic template when assessing children and families. Neoliberal ways of perceiving the world are also instantiated in a bye-law introduced in 2011 which includes a section stipulating that social workers have to 'use limited resources efficiently' and this should inform decision-making relating to the duty of care owed to service users (Irish Statute Book, 2011).

Restructuring and reorganizing capital, to the disadvantage of the majority of the world's inhabitants, neoliberalism has produced an enormous cleavage between the super-rich and the rest. In 2016, according to Oxfam America (2016: 1):

> The gap between rich and poor is reaching new extremes. The richest 1% have accumulated more wealth than the rest of the world put together. Meanwhile, the wealth owned by the bottom half of humanity has fallen by a trillion dollars in the past five years. Just 62 individuals now have the same wealth as 3.6 billion people – half of humanity.

TABLE 1.1   CHARACTERISTICS OF NEOLIBERALIZATION[2]

Characteristic	Defining feature
Breaking with 'embedded' liberalism	No longer adheres to the post WWII socio-economic settlement aiming to achieve full employment and maintain the 'welfare state'. Injection of market competition into all sectors
Remaking the State	The State is not 'rolled-back', as some argued, but is *reshaped* and *reconfigured* to better serve the demands of capital through the installation of 'workfare' regimes where the unemployed (rebranded as 'jobseekers') are corralled into low-waged employment. Evolution of a 'Surveillance State' (Jameson, 2002)
Being pragmatic	Tends to depart from theoretical purity ('textbook neoliberalism'). In practice, neoliberalism is versatile, malleable and incorporates a 'dogged dynamism' (Peck, 2010)
Accumulating by dispossessing	Takes from an increasingly indebted working class and unemployed poor to give to the rich and super-rich
Injecting precariousness into lives	Deploys the rhetoric of 'flexibility' and 'innovation' whilst injecting uncertainty into lives in, and beyond the workplace (Mahmud, 2012)
Imprisoning	Greater use of imprisonment and forms of quasi confinement for marginalised groups
Articulating nationally	Having an affective as well as material dimension, neoliberalism *looks*, *feels* and *sounds* different in different national and local settings

The following year, Oxfam (2017) reported that the concentration in wealth had continued with the world's eight richest billionaires now controlling the same wealth between them as the poorest half of the earth's population. Moreover, the 'world's 10 biggest corporations – a list that includes Wal-Mart, Shell and Apple – have a combined revenue greater than the government revenue of 180 "poorest" countries combined' (Oxfam, 2017: 16).

More pervasively, the remaking of state apparatuses involves a 'dramatic shift in government commitments from securing the welfare of citizens to facilitating the flow of global capital' with this 'accomplished through a depoliticizing discourse of deficits, competitiveness, and balanced budgets, surrounded by an aura of technocratic neutrality' (Bakker, 2003: 70). A fresh and reinvigorated emphasis on competition has been injected into all levels of society, including those areas of life and social interaction previously perceived as *beyond* the reach of competition and commodification (Cooper, 2008; Brown, 2015; Gough, 2015) (see also Table 1.1).

Building on Foucault's analysis, Wendy Brown (2015: 10) lucidly amplifies that neoliberalism

> transmogrifies every human domain and endeavour, along with humans themselves according to a specific image of the economic. All conduct is economic conduct; all spheres of existence are framed and measured in economic terms and metrics, even when those spheres are not directly

monetized. In neoliberal reason and in domains governed by it, we are only and everywhere … an intensely constructed and governed bit of human capital tasked with improving and leveraging its competitive positioning and enhancing its (monetary and nonmonetary) portfolio value across all its endeavors and venues.

For example, within the university sector and driven by a new 'comprador class' (Byrne, 2017: 113) of CEO-style chancellors and presidents, this results in constant competition relating to world league tables, research funding, securing the 'best' academics, erecting state-of-the-art buildings and so on (Holborow, 2015: 110).

Nevertheless, irrespective of the sheer scale of change, there is a need to remain attentive to what remains mostly unchanged. Underlying the 1970s transition from 'embedded liberalism' to neoliberalism, is the enduring, vampiric ability of capitalism to absorb what lies beyond it, economically, politically and culturally. The aim is, in the words of the Martini drinks advertising campaign of the late-1970s, to create private profit 'any time, any place, anywhere'. This dynamic logic continuing, during the period of neoliberalism, 'monetizes and commodifies every aspect of our lives, making every thing, person and interaction subject to the value that can be realized in exchange' (Skeggs, 2014: 2). Furthermore, as Eve Chiapello and Norman Fairclough (2002: 187) summarise, the capitalist system has the capacity to take on 'highly variable historical forms' whilst continuing to be capitalist because of the 'continuity of a number of central features (wage labour, competition, private property, orientation to capital accumulation, technical progress, the rampant commodification of all social activities)'. Financialization has resulted in an enormous increase in indebtedness with, at the 'end of 2008, 70 percent of U.S. families held credit cards, with the total credit card debt reaching $972.73 trillion. The turn to debt is linked with the decline in savings triggered by the decline in wages' (Mahmud, 2012: 476) [3].

However, despite the attacks on welfare that have occurred, the data on spending reveals a complex picture. In short, there has been no withering away of the welfare state (Eagleton-Pierce, 2016: 191). While the discrepancy between the neoliberal rhetoric and actual spending patterns may appear 'puzzling' (Eagleton-Pierce, 2016: 178), there is a need to note that wholesale welfare retrenchment is difficult to achieve because drastic public spending cuts are likely to be counterproductive and risk generating unmanageable political opposition and resistance. In terms of the social administration of welfare provision, previous 'political and legal legacies can "lock-in" current government spending patterns' limiting the room for control and manoeuvre' (Eagleton-Pierce, 2016: 178). More fundamentally, capitalism requires substantial state financial outlays, not only to maintain a measure of stability and social harmony, but to help pacify and engineer the smooth social reproduction of the workforce (Offe, 1984).

Relatively high levels of expenditure on welfare throughout the neoliberal period illuminates the fact that actual spending on welfare may not be the most interesting or revealing indicator of what is actually taking place. For example, the patterns of

expenditure allocated to so-called jobseekers reveals little about the injection of social authoritarianism and enhanced surveillance evolving in recent years. Jobseekers are increasingly subject to coercive measures and forms of 'psycho-compulsion' aiming to insert them into low-wage and precarious niches within the labour market (Friedli and Stearn, 2015). However, metrics of government expenditure data may actually mask substantial shifts occurring in 'policy, purpose, access conditions' and 'forms of delivery' (Clarke, 2004: 16).

In recent years, some of Williams' keywords have become less significant, whereas others have been reactivated or had their meanings significantly re-worked (see also Eagleton-Pierce, 2016). Many have been deployed by the political right to try and win consent for socially retrogressive policies (Garrett, 2009, 2013a, 2014a, 2016b). Writing prior to the economic crash beginning in 2007, Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) refer to a 'new spirit' of capitalism more inclined to encompass the themes of well-being and social justice. Post-crash, such a tendency has become even more marked and this is exemplified by the startlingly cynical speech made by Theresa May on becoming UK prime minister in July 2016. Having been part of an administration presiding over relentless austerity measures, she proudly declared her intention to 'fight against … burning injustice' (see also Reflection and Talk Box 2).

Even before Prime Minister May's intervention, other leading Conservatives had strategically committed themselves to tackling social injustice, as evinced by a number of the publications from the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ). Partly driven by the desire to claim some of the terrain historically inhabited by the social democratic centre-left, the phrase, by now emptied of its progressive meaning, has been harnessed to the project of levering people into work. More expansively, under the 'interchangeable rubrics of "modernization", "reform", "democracy", "the West", "the international community", "human rights", "secularism", "globalization", and various others, we find nothing but an historical attempt at an unprecedented regression' (Badiou, 2012: 4). In this context, powerful organisations, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), continue to play a pivotal role. Moreover, often completely 'disregarding local traditions and cultures', the language used seeks to create 'super-uniformity' amongst nation-states (Holborow, 2015: 106; see also Chapter 4).

Underpinning the exploration in this book, therefore, will be an attentiveness to how, aligned with neoliberal rationality, there is an intense, yet often stealthy, endeavour to adjust or recalibrate the 'semantic order of things' (Brown, 2015: 27). As the late Doreen Massey (2015: 24) stated, this development impacts on the quotidian and mundane social interactions given that on 'trains and buses, and sometimes in hospitals and universities too', we have become customers, not passengers, patients or students. In all these instances, a 'specific activity and relationship is erased by a general relationship of buying and selling that is given precedence over it' (Massey, 2015: 24).

Although still embedded in Article 22 of the United Nations (1948) Universal Declaration of Human Rights, today the phrase 'social security' is rarely uttered in

social policy politics in the UK. In a debate on 'welfare reform' in the House of Lords in 2011 Baroness Hollis remarked: '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' (in Williams, 2013). Perhaps surprisingly, the unsuccessful challenger to Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the UK Labour Party attempted to resuscitate 'social security' in a campaign speech in July 2016. Referring to the Department for Work and Pensions having become a 'byword for cruelty and insecurity', Owen Smith pledged to replace it with a manly 'muscular Ministry for Labour and a dedicated Department for Social Security' (Smith, 2016).

More generally, security tends to be mostly embedded in discourses and practices intent on combating terrorism and, across the Atlantic, this is symbolised by the US government's designation of the department of 'Homeland Security' (see also Neocleous, 2008). However, on occasions there is a conflation of themes as illustrated by one tabloid front page headline: 'Terror Family on UK Benefits', *Daily Star Sunday*, 2015, 11 January: 1). Crudely and skilfully merging two, seemingly, different themes promotes a socially authoritarian and xenophobic worldview at a time when there is the 'largest refugee crisis since the Second World War, with more the 22 million people forcibly displaced from their countries by war and persecution' (Legrain, 2016: 7).

The current 'refugees crisis' has contributed to a rise in 'welfare chauvinism' (Keskinen et al., 2016). This refers to the ways in which neo-nationalist and culturally racist parties make use of the welfare state and welfare benefits to draw 'the distinction between "us" and "them" – the natives that are perceived to deserve the benefits and the racialized "others" who are portrayed as undeserving and even exploiting the welfare system at the cost of the "rightful" citizens' (Keskinen et al., 2016: 322). Clearly linked to the material hardships prompted by the imposition of austerity measures, 'new forms of hostility' towards migrants and ethnic minorities, observable in many parts of Europe, 'build on and gain their power from the exclusionary nationalist and racialising ideologies, policies and practices that are part of European history' (Keskinen et al., 2016: 326). As Gargi Bhattacharya (2015: 38) laments, there often seems to be 'discernible enthusiasm for monstering others… when few opportunities to mark superiority are available'.

This development might also be connected to the rise of Marine Le Pen and the Front National in France and the UK Independence Party (UKIP). It can also be interpreted as intertwined, in complex ways, with the Brexit 'no' vote in the summer of 2016. It is echoed in the Nordic countries by political formations such as the (True) Finn Party, the Danish People's Party and the Sweden Democrats. Part of the appeal of such parties is that they position themselves as defenders of welfare for 'hardworking' 'native' people under threat from 'unregulated' migration and the implicit, associated danger of terrorism. In Sweden, an assortment of neo-Nazis and extreme nationalist fringe parties has amalgamated to form the Sweden Democrats, now posing as the true champions and reliable safeguards of the

folkhem – the historically rooted Swedish concept of welfare (Norocel, 2016; see also Andersson, 2009). Often amplified by corporate media outlets, the popularity of such parties strengthens the 'selective logic' distinguishing between 'desired' and 'undesired' migrants with a new emphasis being placed on 'migrants' presumed '"utility"' [or otherwise] to the nation and its welfare' (Keskinen et al., 2016: 324). In Denmark, for example, this logic results in potential immigrants being sifted, and their worth calibrated, by the state having regard to whether or not they obtained a degree from a university with a high 'world ranking'. It is, therefore, 'no longer a question of whether or not welfare chauvinism is present in the Danish policy frames. Now it is a question of what kind of welfare chauvinism is articulated in the various political party programmes, proposals and debates' (Jørgensen and Thomsen, 2016: 346). To differing degrees, such ideological currents and toxic analytics are now lodged within the political mainstream and they cannot solely be discussed in terms of the 'fringe' parties on the political right.

In the UK, this dimension was illustrated by the Labour Party's production of the notorious 'Controls On Immigration' mug in the period leading up to the 2015 General Election (Sommers, 2015). Such moves undermine the ethic of social solidarity underpinning the construction of the welfare state. Moreover, they can be interpreted as integral to the neoliberal project of welfare retrenchment within which 'the "immigrant" is a particular model of undeservingness' (Guentner et al., 2016: 106).

WELFARE WORDS AND ME: THE AIMS OF THE BOOK

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

The usage of welfare words might be conceptualised in terms of what Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) refers to as the struggle to maintain hegemony and they are circulated and promoted by figures located within the state and/or particular fields of 'expertise'. The media play a significant role in amplifying, popularising and socially embedding them. Nestled within wider 'common sense' understandings, welfare words might also be interpreted as forming parts of a wider, politically distracting 'screen discourse' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2001: 4), deflecting attention from issues related to capitalism, economic exploitation and a differential

distribution of power. These words reflect – or mask – how the dominant order is constructed contributing to its constitution and consolidation. However, each word can also, to varying degrees, be perceived as a repository into which 'different sets of actors can pour multifarious meanings, from the hegemonic to the counter-hegemonic' (Eagleton-Pierce, 2016: 144). (If, for some readers, many of the phrases and concepts appearing in the last two paragraphs appear too dense and clunkily alienating, I hope that things will become clearer in the following chapter and as we get deeper into the book.)

Throughout *Welfare Words*, discourse refers to a constellation of interconnected statements, explanations and lines of reasoning functioning to define a given situation at particular historical junctures. Discourses operate within what Bourdieu calls 'fields' – such as social work – determining implicit rules of engagement and restricting what can be legitimately and 'appropriately' represented, said and done. Coupling this understanding to the work of Gramsci, it can be perceived how a pervasive plethora of powerful and dominating discourses, whilst fluid and failing to extinguish the possibility of countervailing alternative ways of sense-making and re-ordering, contribute to the maintenance of neoliberal hegemony, bolstering the solidity of the ruling class (see also Chapter 2)[4].

This book is, of course, not news from nowhere. Its aspiration and intent is, in part, reflective of my specific situatedness. All of us are, as Gramsci observed, products of personal and wider historical processes that deposit 'an infinity of traces' (in Forgacs, 1988: 326). The 'traces', likely to influence my own perceptions on welfare words, include failing the 11+ examination which tested the 'intelligence' of school children to allocate them a place within a new tripartite system of secondary education (see also Ball, 2015: 823). As a result, I became part and product of the English secondary modern school system (Willis, 1977). Now living on the edge of Europe in the west of Ireland, this cultural, political and economic location also impacts on my interpretation of the welfare words examined.

Referring back to Williams, his *Keywords* can be also viewed as a product of his 'habitus' and, despite his working-class origins, his being a Cambridge don and prominent member of the left intelligentsia (Bourdieu, 2002). With him, I share a gender and a commitment to left politics, but my location in social space is clearly very different. Born almost half a century after Williams, I am of a different generation. Williams was Welsh and I am a complex amalgam of Irish and English (see also Williams, 1979; Williams and Eagleton, 1989). Following a lengthy period of unemployment, I worked as a welfare rights worker in a trade union centre. I am now employed – as was Williams – in a university, but one bereft of the 'symbolic capital' attached to the University of Cambridge (see also Eagleton, 1998). These factors aside, Williams was also a pipe smoker and was much more erudite and smarter than I will ever be.

I have an autobiographical and experiential engagement with some of our welfare words and, even if this is not rendered explicit, it might fruitfully contribute to my interpretation and analysis. At the same time, my generational location and habitus

may mean that I will fail to grasp and that I am inadequately attuned to the significance and trajectory of emergent words, phrases and practices. Given my membership of the *Critical Social Policy* editorial collective over a number of years, my readings will be viewed through what might be loosely, and unsurprisingly, termed a critical social policy lens. Such a viewpoint entails recognising that the 'power to name a social problem has vast implications for the policies considered suitable to address it' (Silver, 1994: 533). Hence, it is vital that we try to interrogate and question how issues and 'social problems' emerge and become the focus of social, cultural and political contestation (see also Garrett, 2007a).

Because of my class origins and generation, I recollect times when some of the words we will look at may have meant something different; for example, within official discourse, welfare was not – although never socially neutral – always uttered with a sneer, so saturated in stigmatising connotations and wedded to dependency (see also Chapter 3). In a more general historical sense, whilst not seeking to promote a 'golden age' narrative around the welfare state, it is still important to acknowledge that 'after 1945, social programmes in the advanced-capitalist countries brought a limited redistribution of wealth and higher standards of living for major sectors of the working class, especially where trade unions were strong' (Iglesias, 2015: 7). As Nancy Fraser (2016: 109) asserts:

> it was above all the working classes—both women and men—who spearheaded the struggle for public provision … In effect, they were voting for family, country and lifeworld against factory, system and machine … [The] state-capitalist settlement resulted from a class compromise and represented a democratic advance.

The welfare state was a complex, somewhat contradictory, form of achievement secured by the working class and, in this sense, an element of nostalgia can be intellectually and politically generative (see also Boym, 2001). There are, in fact, many varieties of nostalgia, 'kinds that are fetishes in the bad sense, genuine blockages, and kinds that are weapons' which can be directed at those seeking to re-appropriate and re-privatise the social gains derived from the struggles of the past (Berlant in Helms et al., 2010: 5). The latter will colour the perspective of *Welfare Words*.

At no point should we embark on the politically, and existentially, forlorn task of trying to re-install anachronistic meanings of particular words. Some older meanings and practices are, of course, pernicious and should not be restored. This applies, for example, to child adoption, which the current government in the UK is seeking to reassemble to mirror, in many ways, the oppressive practices and attitudes of the 1950s (see also Chapter 9). Indeed, this book will be characterised by recognition that there is a need to create a different kind of state to that which evolved as part of the social and economic settlement emerging at the end of the Second World War (Newman and Clarke, 2015).

More broadly, shunning a 'golden age' interpretation, it is acknowledged that the welfare state was implicated in gendered and racialised forms of order making and exclusion (Clarke, 2004; Newman and Clarke, 2015; see also Chapter 3). As Bourdieu confided at the beginning of the century, we are 'paradoxically led to defend what is not entirely defensible' (Bourdieu in Grass and Bourdieu, 2002: 71). Even more critically, it has been argued that the 'idealised post-war welfare state and the Marshallian model of social citizenship … are in some respects little more than comforting phantoms' produced by a yearning for a 'political imaginary whose efficacy has long since passed' (Pitcher, 2006: 61). In this context, as we know, forms of citizenship take meaning from the 'implication that there is an outside, a space of non-citizenship where such rights and entitlements do not apply' (Bhattacharyya, 2015: 28). The continuing targeting and demonization of migrants in the UK and elsewhere reinforces this understanding.

No attempt will be made in in this book to replicate Williams' *Keywords*. The format is very different with a lengthier focus and investigation of themes associated with far fewer words and phrases. This book will not, therefore, furnish a comprehensive lexicon of words that are central to social work and social policy (see, for example, Timms and Timms, 1982; Davies, 2000; Greve, 2014). Moreover, the aim is not to determine what are 'good' and 'bad' words or what is the decontaminated, 'real' or 'authentic' meaning of the particular words examined. Meriting quoting at length, Marnie Holborow (2015: 121) lucidly articulates that the prime critical purpose should be to:

> unpick the ideological content of any language emanating from the ruling class of a society, it is necessary to identify the link between the language and the specific social world it seeks to represent, including its distortions of reality which have the potential to undermine its hegemony. To grasp how ideology is condensed in certain expressions, it is necessary to see language not as a discursive practice within its own constraints – an 'order of discourse' – but as an utterance which responds to a social order and is fragilely suspended at a social conjuncture.

Some of the words are polysemous, connoting a multiplicity of meanings, and are suggestive of a range of different interpretations. Words, as Terry Eagleton maintains, are 'pulled this way and that by competing social interests, inscribed from within with a multiplicity of ideological accents' (in Holborow, 2015: 128). The key point to recognise is that each of the words and phrases to be discussed can be perceived as focal to a struggle for meaning, where dominant forces seek to embed certain hegemonic understandings to serve their class interests. This is clearly the case with a word, mostly used in a pejorative way – such as underclass – but also with a seemingly, more socially neutral word such as care (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 8).

I will not have recourse to electronic search techniques, drawing on a large corpus of data which tracks and quantifies usage. Whilst not entirely relying on this approach, Arun Kundnani (2012) has used this method to good effect in his critical

exploration of the word 'radicalisation' and I acknowledge the advantages. Before electronic searching, tracking and quantifying became more sophisticated and purportedly encompassing, Deborah Cameron (1998) cautioned against too uncritical reliance on such methods. Her main concerns were that 'corpus-based lexicography' tended to embark on a 'flight from history' and was insufficiently alert to the historical evolution of particular words and phrases (Cameron, 1998: 40). Moreover a 'troubling characteristic' of electronic corpora was that it often focused on large quantities of 'very easy to tag and collect' text derived from the narrow spectrum of British newspapers (Cameron, 1998: 41–2). Frequently situated within a positivist discourse, such methods risked entirely failing to recognise, with sufficient critically analytical rigour, the potency of the 'sign as a site of ideological struggle' (Cameron, 1998: 42).
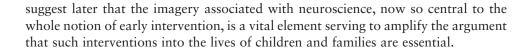
In terms of the investigatory approach adopted, this book will not theorise about language *per se* and is not rooted in applied–linguistic scholarship. Rather, the focus will be on a far from exhaustive list of welfare words and phrases, in an attempt to understand why, and how, they are presently significant in social work and social policy. A disruptive and inquisitive exploration of such words enables us to gain insight into the 'analytical schema or grid of intelligibility' of the social formation in which these words are prevalent (Foucault, 2008: 243). As Chapter 2 makes plain, the book will draw on and utilise concepts and ideas formulated by a number of critical thinkers broadly connected to the disciplines of sociology, social work, social policy and politics.

Welfare Words will not encompass the field of visual sociology (Rose, 2016). However, it is recognised that images are, of course, highly significant. For example, Janet Fink's archival explorations (2008), and especially her detailed analysis of the photographs and captions in the Year Books of the National Children's Home (NCH) charity, illuminates how pictures can help us grasp the historical evolution of particular services. Similarly, the political and cultural landscape of neoliberalism is continually projected via a kaleidoscopic constellation of images. Capital not 'only produces flows of goods and monies but also flows of signs'. An analysis of television 'legitimation' adverts indicates that these 'seem designed to represent corporations as good citizens and ethical actors: environmentally concerned, responsible neighbors supporting local communities' (Goldman and Papson, 2011: 11). Relentlessly light and positive in tone, they 'depict capitalist relations not only as they are, not even as they have been, but as they might be – full of openness, hope, and possibility' (Goldman and Papson, 2011: 17).

In terms of social policy documents, what may appear initially as merely the 'inclusion (or not) of simple illustrations to liven up or improve the appeal of a text heavy document, is imbued with particular latent meanings' tending to favour dominant narratives and interpretations (Wiggan, 2012: 394–5). In short, the visual plays a key role conveying potent agendas and meanings and, despite our focal concern being on words, it is still recognised that neoliberal *remaking* practices are also transmitted through visual presentation (Strangleman, 2008). For example, I will

suggest later that the imagery associated with neuroscience, now so central to the whole notion of early intervention, is a vital element serving to amplify the argument that such interventions into the lives of children and families are essential.

THE ORGANISATION OF THE BOOK

As Durant (2008: 123) concedes, in his discussion on Williams' choices, the issue of 'selection, inclusion and exclusion of candidate "keywords" … is as delicate, or awkward, now as it was then'. As to the particular words and phrases discussed, the choice is largely driven by my own interests and those of my students. My own mode of selection is subjective in that the book is inevitably informed by my political and personal inclinations and many will, of course, detect glaring oversights and omissions. Having said this, all the welfare words and phrases included in the book are ubiquitous within social work and related fields and their usage provides insights into economic and cultural tensions and wider contextual 'social changes' (Voloshinov, 1973: 19).

Although I will focus on a number of specific words and phrases, there will be occasions where I will wander off to explore satellite words moving, so to speak, in the same lexical orbit. For example, in analysing welfare dependency (Chapter 3), it is impossible not to refer to the underclass featured in a different chapter. On other occasions there will be a need to briefly address particular words or phrases, although not the focus of entire chapters, still warranting exploration: it is impossible, for instance, to discuss the underclass without referring to the so-called problem family. Certain words and phrases also seem to almost blend into each other and it may, in fact, be the intention of those propagating them to assemble a deeply ideological mosaic of interconnected themes. Indeed, such a patterning helps to constitute wider, 'common sense' narratives (see also our discussion on Gramsci in Chapter 2).

Chapter 2 provides conceptual insights enabling a better comprehension of some of the welfare words discussed. More specifically, this chapter will explore the work of European thinkers in dialogue with Marx: Antonio Gramsci, Pierre Bourdieu, Loïc Wacquant, the Autonomist Marxist tradition and Jacques Rancière. My perception is that each of them, using different analytical optics, furnishes conceptualisations helping us to account for the prominence of particular welfare words. They alert us to the more encompassing economic, political and cultural context which facilitates the *flow* of these words. Clearly, all are white, male authors and they might be charged with according insufficient analytical attention to questions of intersectionality[5]. I will, however, also seek to draw on writings located within different frameworks sensitive to questions of gender, 'race' and ethnicity. This is not to argue that the theorists selected deploy crude single-axis frameworks and are entirely unattuned to overlapping structures of domination. Some welfare words cannot be critically explored without referring to ideas relating to gender and mothering (e.g. underclass,

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

Chapter 3 focuses on welfare dependency. We begin here because particular constructions of welfare and its contemporary thematic twin – dependency – also inflect the meanings of a number of the other words examined later. Welfare 'dependency' is also prone to infiltrate many of the exchanges that are central to social work and related fields. This chapter also introduces the format to be used in later chapters, starting with the online Oxford English Dictionary definition of the particular welfare word as a 'take-off' point for a more wide-ranging, perhaps even at times unruly, critical exploration of the term and key associated themes.

Sustained by a 'whole journalistic paraphernalia of menacing alterity' (Badiou, 2002: 27), the underclass has been to the fore in debates on the future of welfare and this word will be the focal concern of Chapter 4. Here, it will be maintained that there are a range of other derogatory labels that have been used, throughout history, to label and regulate the poor and the marginalised. For example, the latest, and most prominent, addition would seem to be Troubled Families. Chapter 5 focuses on social exclusion and dwells on problems with this conceptualisation. It will also look at the situation of the Roma community in the Republic of Ireland to try to discern whether this well-worn phrase may or may not be useful in triggering meaningful changes to address the plight of this group (see also McGarry, 2017). Early intervention 'carries such an overwhelming, *a priori* correctness' (Featherstone et al., 2014: 1737) that it appears beyond question. However, key questions are posed in Chapter 6 investigating the current and seemingly omnipresent fixation with this phrase and practice: What may be the assumptions underpinning early intervention? What roles are mothers particularly expected to play within a conceptual framework in which early intervention is increasingly to the fore?

Resilience is now a prominent welfare word, but it will be argued in Chapter 7 that there is still a need to resist 'resilience talk' becoming uncritically incorporated into the 'common sense' of professions such as social work. Chapter 8 explores care and amplifies the argument that the present strains on care have 'deep systemic roots in the structure of our social order' (Fraser, 2016: 100). The following chapter focuses on child adoption. Finally, the short Conclusion brings together a number of the themes explored in the context of apparent shifts taking place with the introduction of what I term 'rhetorically recalibrated neoliberalism'.

In what follows, I am mindful of the fact that some readers might find my references to social work and social policy in England and – less frequently – Ireland as rather narrow and limiting. Perceptions, policies and practices, relating to welfare words, may differ across the 'devolved entities' of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Scotland, for example, provides a very different – and often more socially progressive – national framing for some of the issues we will examine and allude to

in this book (Mooney and Scott, 2015). The devolved Welsh administration is also at odds with the policies of the Conservative government (Drakeford, 2012). Nationalist opposition to the implementation of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 in Northern Ireland threatened the viability of the 'peace process' and risked collapsing the Northern Ireland Executive. Relating to Chapter 3, Mike Tomlinson (2016: 106) notes the 'narrative of dependency' is apt to shift from 'the social pathology of individuals to the economic and political pathology' of Northern Ireland as a whole.

There may also be a risk that this exploration is insufficiently attentive to what Connell (2007) dubs 'southern theory' with undue weight being given to the preoccupations of northern Europe and the United States. Indeed, it is conceded that those located elsewhere may need to decipher some of the welfare words explored, and others not featured, in their own specific national and cultural contexts. This is because 'welfare arrangements' will appear different in different locations (Pfau-Effinger, 2005: 4). Hence, some readers may feel they need to taper themes and issues featured in the 'Reflection and Talk Boxes' to fit local and particular circumstances.

REFLECTION AND TALK BOX 1

1. The list of welfare words and phrases to be discussed is, of course, far from exhaustive. Having read this chapter, therefore, you may feel that certain significant welfare words and phrases are absent. What are these? Why are they important and why do you think they merit insertion into a book such as this?

FURTHER READING

Readers are encouraged to look at Williams' (1983) *Keywords*. Two recent books, both influenced by Williams, are those produced by Eagleton-Pierce (2016) and Fritsch et al. (2016a). One written in the UK and the other in North America, both locate their exploration of keywords within the economic and social fabric of neoliberalism. Bourdieu and Wacquant's (2001), short, accessible – and scathing – article also chimes with the themes explored in *Welfare Words*. Similarly, Wendy Brown's (2015) intervention is an invaluable accompanying resource. A very useful glossary of some of the conceptualisations featured in what follows is provided by Nick Crossley's (2005) *Key Concepts in Critical Social Theory*. More generally, there is much to be gained by noting how, on an on-going basis, the words and phrases used in *Welfare Words* feature in the media.