

Progress reports

Geographies of welfare and social exclusion: dimensions, consequences and methods

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In the first of this series of reports I reviewed research into social polarization, segregation and exclusion. The focus was very much on material dimensions of exclusion, and this report is an attempt to examine work on some wider social dimensions of exclusion. Thus, in addition to highlighting important work which continues to appear on sociospatial polarization, I also consider work on access to basic necessities: housing, food and communications. I then outline work which has considered some ramifications of exclusion in relation to crime, health and social cohesion. I conclude with some reflections on the range of methods now being deployed to understand exclusion. There is an Anglo-American bias to this – indeed an Anglocentric bias – but the focus on a small range of societies helps to highlight the overlapping nature of some of the dimensions of social exclusion and the underlying processes.

First, continuing a theme in the first of these reports, important work continues to emerge on the conceptualization and measurement of sociospatial polarization and segregation. Wacquant (1999: 1640–44) locates these processes in the context of a new urban regime of ‘advanced marginality’, fuelled by four ‘dynamics’. These are: the resurgence of social inequality (the macrosocial dynamic); the mutation of wage labour (the economic dynamic; see also Merrifield, 2000a; 2000b); the reconstruction of welfare states (the political dynamic); and processes of concentration and stigmatization (the spatial dynamic). These processes produce a range of outcomes, as can be shown from work in several cities on segregation and polarization. Thus, criticism of the so-called ‘global cities’ hypothesis has been extended by several authors, such as Hamnett and Cross (1998) on income distribution in London, Baum’s (1997) work on Sydney, and Clark and McNicholas’s (1996) study of Los Angeles. Studies of Canadian, French and Italian cities have demonstrated the complexity of interactions between polarization

and ethnicity. Thus Ley and Smith (2000) suggest that areas suffering multiple deprivation in Canadian cities neither overlapped nor were as spatially contained nor as stable over time as had been their US counterparts, and that, for immigrant groups, mobility rather than entrapment remained the dominant experience. In contrast Rhein's (1998) study of Paris emphasized a double process of social polarization and spatial concentration of foreign households, while Petsimeris (1998) found increasing segregation. Musterd and de Winter (1998) assembled the results of studies of 20 cities in the USA and Europe; while segregation was greater in the USA than Europe, more liberal regimes (the UK, Brussels) displayed higher levels of segregation of ethnic groups than cities under social-democratic regimes (Germany, the Netherlands). Even in Sweden there was clear evidence of segregation, both along ethnic and socio-economic lines, although the latter was clearly dominant (Andersson, 1999). The recent collection of essays by Khakee *et al.* (1999) demonstrates the extent to which minority and migrant groups have been excluded from the process of urban renewal in various European contexts.

Other issues raised in the first of these reports continue to attract attention. Mackay (1999) demonstrates the extent to which economic trends in the UK have resulted in the expulsion from paid work of substantial numbers of men. He focuses particularly on forms of 'non-work': early retirement, government training schemes, and permanent sickness. Non-work accounted for over 25% of men of working age in several of the peripheral regions of the UK. The more difficult the regional situation, the higher the level of non-work – in other words, withdrawal from the labour force. Mackay's work highlights the deficiencies of 'market clearing' or 'natural rate' theories of unemployment, which imply that work is available for all those who demonstrate flexibility.

Much attention has also been given to spatial mismatches between jobs and those most in need of them (Preston and McLafferty, 1999) with particular emphasis being placed on the implications for minorities (e.g., Fieldhouse, 1999; Ross, 1998). Gilbert (1998) refines these arguments by pointing to the adverse experiences of Afro-American women in the job market (and in terms of access to jobs) compared to white women. Merrifield (2000a) argues that the quality of such jobs as are available is a major issue, as corporations rely to a growing degree on forms of contingent or casual labour. Merrifield therefore contends that Marxist insights into class relations are as salient now as ever, since the use of such contingent labour has gone hand-in-hand with a booming stock market and gross income disparities. Putting this in a global context he views globalization as class war: corporate downsizing is accompanied both by job losses in the USA and downward pressure on minimalist labour standards in the East (Merrifield, 2000b), the use of child labour by prominent western corporations being a case in point.

How these processes work out locally is a contingent matter, the impact varying in terms not just of location but also of household structure. This point is made very well by Bondi and Christie's (2000) study of households in very contrasting circumstances in Edinburgh and Swindon. Marginal owner-occupiers in Swindon, facing severe pressure on household budgets, found that their everyday lives were concentrated around their homes, which had almost become prisons. The gentrifiers of Edinburgh, on the other hand, experienced very few constraints on their highly mobile lifestyles.

Reference should also be made to work on particular social groups. Despite considerable concern about family structures – perhaps regrettably sparked off by underclass

theorists – there has been relatively little work on the geography of family structures. Bradshaw *et al.* (1996) have mapped the distribution of one-parent families in the UK. McKendrick's (1995a; 1998a; 1998b) studies constitute a thorough assessment of the evidence for the UK. He demonstrates substantial local variation – within both Greater Manchester, and Strathclyde – in family structures, and considers the implications for policy, a theme taken up by Duncan and Edwards (1999), who call for social policies which are more sensitive to spatial variation. Gordon (1995) argues that disparities in exam results are most convincingly explained in terms of socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, the most important of which was the varying proportion of lone-parent families (p. 419). The ecological link between family structures and achievement was not just a question of material resources and consideration of family structures could not, therefore, be left to neoconservatives.

The marginalization of men in certain contexts also continues to attract attention, as McDowell's (2000) review points out: in terms of education and employment, young men in particular are falling behind. This is particularly the case, in the USA, for African-American males (Johnson *et al.*, 2000; Sanchez-Jankowski, 1999), but the point could equally be made with reference to migrant groups in European cities.

I Consequences and costs of social exclusion

Writing in the late 1980s, Bodenheimer (1989) somewhat apocalyptically referred to the revisitation upon the west of the 'health problems of peripheral nations'. Anecdotal comparisons of infant mortality rates of a 'Bronx-versus-Bangladesh' kind are now a commonplace journalistic cliché. Here I want to connect the themes of health, crime and social cohesion in order to demonstrate the costs of social polarization and their effects on the character of public space.

Bodenheimer was right. The resurgence of tuberculosis (TB) in the UK and USA has been documented by Elender *et al.* (1998) and, more generally, by Wallace and Wallace (2000). Ecological associations have been demonstrated between poverty, overcrowding and TB; the spread of the disease is also facilitated by homelessness and by the concentration of the homeless into congregate shelters. Treating it is further exacerbated by cutbacks in welfare programmes; as Farmer (1997: 348) points out, the rapid re-emergence of TB in New York could have been predicted, because 'the city allowed its TB infrastructure to crumble'. It is not difficult to link this explicitly to the structural forces which have produced growing homelessness and poverty. Some commentators, such as Wallace and Wallace (2000; see also Wallace *et al.*, 1999) contend that the 'planned shrinkage' of parts of the Bronx has had catastrophic social consequences, expressed in high levels of premature mortality and widening health inequalities.

Even in locations not as stressed as New York there has been evidence of widening health inequalities which are largely put down to persistent and diverging levels of socioeconomic prosperity. In Britain the best illustration of this is Dorling's (1997) work on the widening gap – relative to the national experience of mortality – between the most healthy and least healthy areas (see also Davey-Smith *et al.*, 1999). At a small-area level there is also evidence of divergence, with some wards in northern England and Scotland moving further away from the national mean in both directions (McLoone and Boddy, 1994; Phillimore *et al.*, 1994). The result was that the

least healthy areas were lagging some 40 years behind the most healthy in terms of mortality experience.

How are such patterns to be explained? Clearly material circumstances play a central role, but there are extensive debates about the relationship between them and other influences, such as income inequality and social cohesion. One influential view suggests that, above a certain minimum level of income, it is intrastate disparities in income that have the greatest effect on health status (Wilkinson, 1996). Thus the most unequal societies are likely to exhibit greater health inequalities.

Emphasizing the health costs of social inequality, and their connections with social cohesion, leads logically to consideration of another issue: the extent to which crime (or fear of crime) results from social polarization, and the extent to which a consequence is a decline in social interaction, and thus in the quality of the public sphere. My intention here is not so much to explore the quantitative dimensions of the risk of crime (see Fyfe, 1997, for British evidence) as to consider the processes by which attempts are made to 'purify' public space in the interests of minimizing disorder.

A good place to start is with Taylor's (1996; see also Taylor *et al.*, 1996) study of fear of crime in the suburbs of Manchester. He argues that defensive tactics (neighbourhood watch schemes, etc.) deserve to be taken seriously as a suburban social movement. Fixated on the possibility of violent incursions from cities near and far, Taylor's residents practised an exclusionary politics with clear racial overtones. In other contexts, advanced forms of surveillance, such as CCTV, are routinely used to monitor and exclude those perceived as not 'belonging' in commercial spaces such as shopping malls. The consequence of these widespread developments has been a 'subtle privatization of public space as commercial imperatives define acceptable behaviour' (Fyfe and Bannister, 1998: 263). There is now much work on the changing character of public space and in particular on the ways it is managed in an exclusionary way (e.g., Graham, 1998; Aurigi and Graham, 1997; Merrifield, 2000c). There is also work on the use of technologies (alarms, etc.) by wealthy residents in order to manage perceived threats to their security; as Light (2000) observes, one effect is greater demand on publicly funded police services. This has led some to talk of the end of public space, prophesying an era in which different social strata no longer mix – if they ever did – on equal terms (Mitchell, 1995). Taylor (1996) suggests that social polarization raises the question of how citizens can 'deal with difference and still live in an organised civil society' (p. 320).

In this context, there are important research issues concerning how individuals and institutions negotiate and manage public space. There are still few studies along the lines of Anderson's (1991) work on individual responses to this (including microscale ethnography of how individuals dealt with situations on the street) or Keith's (1993) work on the policing of key 'symbolic locations' in London. The issue of whether deprivation leads to disorder is picked up in these works and by Power's (1998) work on large-scale housing projects in northern Europe. However, she rejects simplistic associations, such as the contention that disorder and crime in some sense represent the 'collective bargaining of the dispossessed'. Others are less sanguine, with Castells (1996: 162–65) speaking of 'wild zones', the 'black holes of informational capitalism' and their corollary, the 'territorial confinement of systemically worthless populations'. He sees these as inevitable corollaries of current developmental trajectories and is pessimistic about the capability of existing institutions to manage them.

II Bare necessities: food, shelter and services

Considerable evidence exists which suggests problems of access to basic services in the advanced capitalist nations. This might almost be termed a second rediscovery of poverty, at a time when the rolling-back of the welfare state, and the deregulatory thrust of economic policies, has exposed individuals and places to chill winds. The consequences can be demonstrated through research on a range of issues.

The question of access to food was an early concern of radical geography (Peet, 1971) while as early as 1964 there was documentation of the flight of retail businesses from the central city to the suburbs (Alwitt and Donley, 1997: 140). Recent trends in retailing have caused the issue to resurface, it being believed that food 'deserts' restrict the ability of low-income groups to access a healthy diet. There are few empirical studies of this. Alwitt and Donley (1997) found that the issue went beyond 'supermarkets and banks': the retail profile of poor areas of Chicago was quite distinctive, with overrepresentation of small, high-priced grocers, drug stores and liquor stores. Cummins and MacIntyre (1999) investigated spatial variations in the price and availability of food, but did not find evidence for the existence of food deserts in Glasgow. If anything, food stores were more numerous in more deprived localities. However, there was also evidence that less healthy diets were relatively cheaper in poorer areas, so that the issue was less one of physical access than of price. This was also the conclusion of Donkin *et al.* (1999); in their study area (a deprived, multi-ethnic part of London) the cost of a healthy diet would absorb over 50% of the income of a single person dependent on state benefits. Pritchard (2000: 210) echoes these comments with respect to Australia, referring to an 'emerging consumption superstructure reflecting and supporting new geographies of class and inequality'. The explanation for this pattern is to be found in a combination of structural change in retailing, in favour of large supermarkets, combined with a regulatory environment which has generally favoured such developments (Wrigley, 1998). There are some signs that multiples are reinvesting in disadvantaged areas, but the trade-off here is between low price and quality.

The rise of homelessness has been the most visible index of social polarization, and the processes underpinning it are aptly summarized in the title of Wolch and Dear's (1993) book, *Malign neglect*. A combination of structural economic change and neoliberal programmes of welfare state restructuring is clearly responsible, simultaneously forcing large numbers of people to seek work and restricting expenditure on and eligibility for public housing. As several commentators show, legislative responses to homelessness have characteristically focused on containment of the perceived threat to social order posed by vagrancy, and on assignment of the homeless to the category of the 'undeserving poor' (Mitchell, 1998a; 1998b; Cloke *et al.*, 2000a). The result is the severe restriction of housing options either to shelters, hostels, or to on-street living, and the health consequences of this (in terms of dramatically reduced life expectancy) have been demonstrated graphically by Shaw *et al.* (1999). There is now a body of material which explores the quantitative dimensions of homelessness and policy responses to it (Burrows *et al.*, 1997; Pleace, 1998; Mitchell, 1997; 1998a; 1998b) but until recently there has been rather less on the geographies of the homeless themselves. Some have emphasized that the homeless move in attempt to gain access to resources (employment, housing) not otherwise available to them (Wolch and Dear, 1993). Others argue that the movements of the homeless can be related to questions of sociospatial

control and resistance, emphasizing enforced movement (Mitchell, 1997; Smith, 1996). There are also suggestions (e.g., Cloke *et al.*, 2000b) that, despite the constraints within which they operate, the homeless do exercise a degree of choice about the tactics they use. Winchester and Costello (1995), for instance, found evidence of a supportive culture of homelessness among Australian street children, a culture which had well-defined codes of behaviour and resistance. This, of course, is not meant to imply a romanticization of the situation of the homeless. Novel research strategies and tactics are required to reconstruct the pattern of mobility of the homeless, and its underlying causes, and to understand the meanings attached to particular environments by the homeless. May's (2000a; 2000b) attempts to explore these issues are exemplary. His work investigates the meanings of home through painstaking biographical reconstruction of key life events, and demonstrates the diverse experiences of homeless men: displacement, for those who have had infrequent experiences of homelessness; lives of semi-permanent 'haunting' of places on the hostels circuit; and, at worst, for those who have never experienced a place they can call home, a deep-seated disorientation and alienation (see also Rollinson, 1998).

Most would agree that shelter and food are basic necessities, but there is a case to be made that access to utilities and financial services are necessities in contemporary societies. In a series of papers Graham and Marvin (1994; 1995) have documented the ways in which the recent restructuring of the utilities has marginalized poor communities. Drawing a familiar contrast between a Fordist era and its putative successor, they contend that basic utilities were treated as 'quasi-collective goods available to all on a universal service/universal tariff basis' (1995: 175). The deregulation of these industries has perhaps predictably promoted polarization in the cost and quality of utility infrastructures. Whereas the most lucrative segments of the market are the focus of increasingly intense competition, there is little competition in marginal locations, which then receive poor-quality services at relatively high cost. The utility companies stand accused of social dumping, making it harder for low-income groups to access services which are fundamental to existence in a modern industrial society (Graham and Marvin, 1994). Speak and Graham (1999) have documented the quantitative and qualitative aspects of this for the UK: they point out that quantitative indicators of exclusion from use of utilities (such as disconnections for non-payment of bills) actually hide the real scale of the problem of access to services. Indeed underconsumption, one possible response by users, may itself be hazardous, potentially increasing the risk of the spread of disease, in the case of reduced use of water. Interestingly, they argue that what were formerly extensive networks of universal service have in effect become patterns of points to which low-income users must travel, often at considerable expense, for example in order to recharge prepayment cards for utility meters. They also show how processes of marketization work cumulatively to the disadvantage of particular areas across various sectors (banking, telephone, utilities).

Access to cyberspace is also polarized. Even allowing for the reductions in the price of computers, gaining access to new technology is largely out of the question for those on low incomes. Thrift (1995: 31) writes that 'in the electronic ghettos, the space of flows comes to a full stop. Time-space compression means time to spare and space to go nowhere'. On-line sources such as the British government's Social Exclusion Unit, the American federal government's 'falling through the net' project, or the EU's

PROMISE (Promoting the Information Society for Everyone) offer up-to-date statistics on disparities in access to new technology (see, respectively: www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu; www.digitaldivide.gov; and www.stakes.fi/promise). Even in the more prosperous west, however, universal access is some distance away, given relatively low levels of telephone availability (as low as 30% in some UK neighbourhoods).

There is similar work on access to financial services, documenting the withdrawal of services from disadvantaged communities as banks close branches, centralize operations in call centres, and focus on high-value customers, a process referred to by Leyshon and Thrift (1995) as a 'flight to quality' (see also Leyshon and Thrift, 1999; Dymski and Veitch, 1996; Pollard, 1996; and, for a rare rural study of this, Argent and Rolley, 2000). While assessments of what count as necessities must, by definition, be historically specific, few would dispute the view that access to utilities, IT and financial services is essential in contemporary western societies. Such emergent divides are thus a cause for concern.

III Questions of method

Even a cursory glance at the work reviewed in these reports reveals the range of methods being deployed to investigate the character of social exclusion. I would want to highlight three points by way of conclusion.

First, despite the many criticisms of quantification and GIS, recent advances in these areas have permitted important new insights and indicators. The early protagonists of radical geography called for novel indicators, the most prominent being Bunge's (1973) call for measures of neighbourhood stress such as 'rat-bitten regions'. Such work is being done but is only possible through GIS technology; see McLafferty's work on rat-bites in New York (www.geo.hunter.cuny.edu/~slm/rat.html). GIS also permits the long-run analysis of change by constructing consistent spatial units for reporting purposes. At the same time, this technology arguably contributes to social exclusion by determining the microgeography of who does (or does not) gain access to financial services (Leyshon and Thrift, 1999). There has been constructive debate about the pros and cons of various methodologies (e.g., see the special issue of *Environment and Planning A* on quantitative geography (1998), especially Philip, 1998).

Second, and more generally, there is innovation in terms of both indicators of social exclusion and the methods used to investigate it. Philo's (1995) edited collection incorporates papers which bear on this theme, for example McKendrick's (1995b) work on quality-of-life indicators, and Mohan's (1995) use of data on household indebtedness and house repossessions as indicators of economic distress. The explosion of interest in the concept of social capital has led to work on novel indicators of neighbourhood quality and social cohesion. An excellent example here is the work of Sampson and Raudenbush (1999). They are interested in developing indicators of neighbourhood disorder but, as they point out, most studies of this subject have been based upon residents' subjective perceptions drawn from survey responses; biases will result if such measures are used in extensive statistical studies of issues affecting the same residents. Independent measures of neighbourhood social conditions were therefore necessary. They therefore systematically observed 196 census tracts in Chicago, by having a

vehicle drive slowly along every street in these tracts; on each side of the vehicle there was both a video camera and a human observer. In this way, the project could record in considerable detail symptoms of physical disorder (from litter to abandoned cars or syringes) and social disorder (from loitering to drugs or overt violence). The project of course raises ethical issues about covert observation, and would be expensive to replicate, but it has produced a range of indicators which are now being deployed in extensive statistical analyses (e.g., Sampson *et al.*, 1999). In addition to the construction of such indicators, other authors advocate a realization of the importance of a plurality of voices – of letting excluded groups speak for themselves. Sensitive methodologies are required here, designed to generate non-judgemental accounts of individuals' experiences in circumstances where more conventional methodologies are rendered problematic by loss of memory, distrust or fear (May, 2000a; 2000b; Parr, 1997; 1998).

Finally, there is a range of explanations. Much of the focus has been on structural processes of economic change (deindustrialization, corporate reorganization, tertiarization) combined with a reorientation of and cutbacks in the welfare state. This is understandable given the scale of such changes, but it may also be one-sided. One of the key insights of authors such as Sibley (1995; 1998) or Takahashi (1997) is that we need to understand the cultural processes of stigmatization, whereby certain places, and their residents, are constructed as 'marginal' or 'alien' and thus not deserving of help. This has led some to adopt psychoanalytic perspectives to show how dominant groups maintain sociospatial distance from those deemed to be threatening or despised. The corollary of this is attempts at the 'purification' of space, whereby non-conformists who do not 'belong' are systematically removed from view. Takahashi (1998) discusses this at some length in the context of community opposition to facilities for the homeless and people with AIDS: 'the further stigmatized persons and places are from our "home" and "community", the more intense the fear of the unknown' (p. 910). The consequence is that sociospatial stigmatization 'is a mutually-constitutive process, whereby places inherit the stigma of persons, but persons also become stigmatised through their interaction with places'. Moral geographies are thus constructed and reproduced, devaluing communities and those who live there, and undermining efforts at regeneration. The primary causes of social polarization and neighbourhood decline may well be structural, but cultural processes of stigmatization also need to be challenged.

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