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Social Suffering in the Neoliberal Age: Classificatory Logic and Systems of Governance: Book of Abstracts

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Associate Professor Karen Soldatic is an Australian Research Council DECRA Fellow (2016–19) at the Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University. Her DECRA, entitled ‘Disability Income Reform and Regional Australia: The Indigenous Experience’, draws upon two previous fellowships at the British Academy International Visiting Fellowship (2012) and The Centre for Human Rights Education, Curtin University (2011–12), where she remains an Adjunct Fellow. Karen’s research on global welfare regimes builds on her 20 years of experience as an international, national and state-based senior policy analyst and practitioner.

Dr Louise St Guillaume is Discipline Coordinator and Lecturer in Sociology at The University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA) and the E.G. Whitlam Fellow (2019) at the Whitlam Institute within Western Sydney University. Her research examines how Australian policies intersect to govern people with disability, particularly focusing on social security policy, immigration policy and the disability care and support system. Her fellowship at the Whitlam Institute builds upon her PhD research at UNDA (2015), and her Summer Scholarship at the Federal Parliamentary Library (2014), using Whitlam’s legacy as a lens to highlight and reify the problematic shift that Australian disability policy has taken for people with a “partial capacity to work” at the intersection of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and social security reforms.
Social Suffering in the Neoliberal Age: Classificatory Logic and Systems of Governance

Symposium
Thursday, 18 July & Friday, 19 July

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS
How social inequality experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability and other vulnerable groups is sustained and maintained: A ‘paradox of low hanging fruit’.

Scott Avery, Research and Policy Director, First Peoples Disability Network (Australia), and PhD Candidate (UTS)

As a group intersecting two populations who experience vulnerability, Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability have been shown to experience greater social, wellbeing and economic inequalities, even when compared to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or people with disability (Avery, 2018).

This paper will present the findings of a community-based research program which captured empirical observations of ‘intersectional inequality’ and discrimination experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability through their personal testimony and statistical data. Using illustrative examples from the ‘Closing the Gap Framework’ to address Indigenous disadvantage and the National Disability Strategy, it will then synthesise the theory of ‘intersectionality’ with neoclassical economic theory to explain the sustained social and economic disempowerment of vulnerable groups through the exercise of free market principles in the administration of social programs. This creates a ‘paradox of low hanging fruit’, where the more successful the application of social programs to those facing relatively low access barriers, whilst at the same time abandoning the needs of those facing relatively high access barriers, creates a widening of the inequality within the population that the social program aims to benefit.

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Keywords: Social inequality, intersectionality, Indigenous, disability.

‘Classifications of pain: the political economy of dualism’

Seamus Barker, PhD Candidate, University of Sydney

Chronic pain affects twenty percent of the population, with persons of low socioeconomic status overrepresented. The condition is associated with various psychological and social sequellae, including impoverishment. Many of those experiencing chronic pain were injured at work, but struggle to have their workers’ compensation claim accepted as their incapacity prolongs. Access to disability support pensions has also become more restrictive, leaving many with chronic pain with no personal source of income. A classificatory logic is built into the criteria for these pensions, and into the statutory bases for workcover claims, and for settling legal disputes regarding them. This classificatory logic is based upon a dichotomising dualism in which pain, suffering, and disability are understood as either “organic” or “non-organic.” When objective “evidence” cannot be found to fully account for a person’s chronic pain, under this classificatory logic they are imputed causal and moral responsibility for their own pain-related disability. Such classifications result in the denial of claims and pensions,
and in the subjectification of the pain sufferer. Crucially, new scientific theories of pain refute this dichotomising model, and contradict existing classificatory frameworks for pain-related disability. Despite this, governments and insurers seem to fear the fiscal risk associated with removing an “objective” criterion, grounded in the medical gaze, when making determinations of eligibility. How can the statutory frameworks set by government, and enacted in courts – and their existing dichotomising classificatory schema – be made to reflect current science and treat those reporting pain not with suspicion but as epistemically privileged regarding their own pain?

**The classification of single parents as mother/workers in activation reforms and the production of a marginalised workforce**

*Dr Michelle Brady, University of Melbourne*

Australian and UK single parents with dependent children who are in receipt of income support are simultaneously classified as ‘workless’ and “mothers”. This classification comes together in the concept of “workless families” which this paper argues has underpinned and motivated the last two decades of activation programs targeted at this group. This paper therefore argues that much critical commentary on activation programs targeted at single parents has substantially misunderstood the logics that motivates activation reforms. Overwhelmingly existing research has argued that activation reforms are motivated by logics that view single parents as degendered workers or the same as the unemployed. This paper argues this characterisation is flawed as the logic of “workless” families reveals an overwhelming concern with single parents’ parenting role. Based on archival research on key activation reforms targeted at Australian single parents over the last two decades, including Parents Next, Welfare to Work and the Jobs Education and Training program this paper argues that it is the joint classification of single parents as mothers and workers that enables reforms to seek to produce them as a residual workforce that can be relied on to take up casual/part-time – and frequently poorly remunerated – paid work that offers few opportunities for promotion or career advancement. The paper concludes by outlining suggestions for an alternative critique of activation reforms targeted at single parents.

**Living Black and on country: From suffering on the margins to leading a global transition out of ecological crisis.**

*Garrwa Assoc. Prof Jason De Santolo and activist researcher Padraic Gibson, University of Technology Sydney*

As highlighted in the call for papers for this conference, “social suffering in the neo-liberal age”, Indigenous people in Australia face multiple regimes of neo-liberal, neo-colonial governance, aimed at controlling their lives and lands and keeping them at the margins of Australian society.

In the aftermath of the NT Intervention, Aboriginal people living on their lands in the NT are subject to openly discriminatory laws that allow police to raid homes without a warrant, Centrelink to control social security payments through “income management”, special “child protection” teams to forcibly remove children and local “job providers” to force labour for well below award rates - amongst many other measures.
These measures are testament to the continuing punishment and demonisation of Aboriginal people, who continue to hold philosophies and cultural practices that pose a defiant challenge to the “values” of capitalist Australia. This world view is grounded in relationships with lands and waters governed by ancient law and based on kinship, reciprocity and respect. Destroying these relationships to country has been central to imposing an extractivist, capitalist economy which at once dispossesses Black people, commodifies the natural world and destroys and contaminates these lands and waters in the process.

Indigenous peoples have never suffered in silence and continue to resist the imposition both of racist social policies and the destruction of their lands and waters. As social movements rise across the world to meet the mammoth environmental crises of accelerating climate change and mass species extinction, both Indigenous resistance and Indigenous ways of relating to the natural world can often take centre stage in these movements. Especially in a settler-colonial context such as Australia, averting the unfolding ecological collapse must involve decolonisation: negating the current process of extreme marginalisation with an amplified Indigenous led resistance that puts care for country and the rights of Black people to control, live and work on their lands at the centre of a “just transition” agenda.

In this paper, Garrwa Assoc. Prof. Jason De Santolo and activist researcher Padraic Gibson will discuss the regime of “social suffering” currently being enforced on NT communities in particular, along with detail some of the inspiring ways that Indigenous resistance is informing a resurgent movement for climate justice in Australia.

**Urban living older Aboriginal people and the limits of the MyAgedCare model of provision**

*Ellen Finlay, UNSW/NeuRA.*

Aged care provision in Australia occurs in a context of increasing neoliberal informed social and public policy. Through promoting the role of the ‘individual consumer’ neoliberal approaches to social service provision obscure collective inequities, whilst also inscribing rigid, and often arbitrary ‘identity’ categories onto people. Under the current MyAgedCare system in Australia, non-Indigenous providers are able to register themselves as ‘specialised’ aged care services that are safe and appropriate for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Provisional guidelines by the Australian government for services becoming specialised aged care providers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do not require Indigenous ownership or control of the services to operate as a specialist provider. Furthermore, despite the ‘competitive’ market model of aged care provision there remains a dearth of specialised aged care places for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in metropolitan Sydney. Under-investment in urban areas for older Indigenous people represents the implicit assumptions about Aboriginal people in current health and ageing policymaking. Whilst the majority of Aboriginal people in Australia reside in urban centres, health and ageing policy research disproportionately focuses on Aboriginal people living in rural and remote areas of Australia. Through critically analysing government and non-government sources about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care services, I argue that the individualised market approach to aged care erases the distinctiveness of urban Aboriginality, potentially compounding the alienation experienced by urban living older Aboriginal people.
Problem family representations: the construction of intergenerational disadvantage in policy

Dr Kathleen Flanagan, Housing & Community Research Unit, University of Tasmania

One of the recurring tropes of neoliberal governance is that of ‘intergenerational disadvantage’ both as a social problem and an object of social policy concern. As a problem, ‘intergenerational disadvantage’ is located with the family, and therefore the family becomes the point of application for social policy designed to remediate the problem. Previous research has explored how so-called ‘problem families’ have been constructed discursively over time, identifying intersections with other discursive formations, including those of social inadequacy, child development and eugenics. This research has shown how these discursive constellations have produced efforts to identify and classify families through collation of administrative data and policy responses which construct the home as the site of rehabilitative intervention. But the practices underpinning these technologies have changed with the digitisation of government practice in potentially new and troubling ways. In this exploratory paper, I draw on a Foucauldian conceptualise of discourse and Carol Bacchi’s notion of ‘problem representations’ in policy to extend the historical analysis of the ‘problem family’ to emerging interventions in contemporary Australia. These include the expansion of the terrain of income management, actuarial analysis of patterns in government welfare expenditure, and data linkage techniques that allow individual intersections with government agencies to be more efficiently traced across time. Understanding how intergenerational disadvantage is constructed as a ‘problem’ within these emerging policy frameworks is a necessary first step to developing a more nuanced analysis of the ways ‘problem’ families are situated and governed in practice.

Keywords: problem families, child protection, income management, priority investment, data linkage

Shifting through the settlement jigsaw puzzle.

Dominic Golding, NEDA, Project and Policy Officer

Migration has always been about the enforced exclusion of people with disabilities. Immigration policy historically determines who is admitted into the country based on race, compounding this is how disabilities are framed as an impairment and a cost to society. This directly informs the Migration Act and peoples access to welfare where individuals are still assessed on medical grounds. Australian settlement has and continues to be built literally by the white able-bodied male.

Post-WWII and contemporary migration with the support of Australia the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) was formed and formalised entrants from refugees and displaced persons into Australia’s Immigration. Disabilities is still a discrimination clause until 2012 when Australia applied a health waiver to Humanitarian refugees because of Australia ratifying the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD). Yet people with disabilities are still barred or migrants in Australia are placed on deportation flights.
Migrants, Asylum seekers and refugees and humanitarian refugees with disabilities all face barriers when being eligible for welfare payments and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). All migration streams come with differing definitions of not being eligible. This paper is a snapshot of the cultural concerns of being a person with disabilities who have been forcibly displaced, the types of barriers they encounter when applying for welfare and community supports like time of residence in Australia, and the medical complexities of complex needs for newly arrived migrants especially those on Temporary Protection Visas.

This paper draws on my experience working within the intersections of refugee settlement and disability support services. Drawing attention to the siloing of services across health, disability, settlement, and mental health services I want to demonstrate seeking asylum is both political as well as a health and wellbeing right.

**Structural violence, social murder and disability benefits in Britain**

*Dr Chris Grover, Senior Lecturer, Head of Department, Lancaster University*

In a protest outside of the British parliament in 2017 the disabled people’s group, Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) had a banner that read ‘Dead people don’t claim’. DPAC were protesting about the harm caused by, and the social suffering of disabled people as a consequence of, a decade in which governments have made it harder to claim and receive disability benefits, and cut their real and nominal value. This paper will examine the waves of retrenchment and austerity that have structured disability benefits in Britain over the past decade. The changes to disability benefits were driven by a desire to redraw the ‘disability category’ with the aim of restricting the number of people receiving benefits on the grounds of disability. The classification of people as disabled (or not) was to be achieved through the introduction of a new functional capability assessment (the Work Capability Assessment - WCA) of a new income replacement benefit, Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). It can be understood as the mechanism through which people are socially sorted according to their adjudged ability to do wage-labour either now or in the future.

Along with fact that recipients of ESA would be impoverished by cuts to its value compared to the preceding income replacement disability benefit and were to be subject to a sanctioning regime that previously disability benefits were free from, the ESA is particularly damaging, creating stress, anxiety and fear, because of the way that it has informed decision making to withdraw support from disabled people. Drawing upon the work of Johan Galtung it will be argued that the disability benefit regime in Britain is structured by structural violence because of its impacts upon the life chances of, and a widening of the gap between what is and what could be for, disabled people. Because these impacts are essentially known and avoidable it is further argued that their impacts can also be understood, following the 19th century work of Friedrich Engels, as a form of social murder. The killing and maiming of disabled people through austerity in disability benefits.

**Keywords:** disabled people; cuts; harm; impoverishment; violence; wage-labour
Neoliberalism and Higher Education – Compassionate Pedagogy as an act of resistance.

Dr Mick Houlbrook, Western Sydney University.

Neoliberalism in Higher Education (HE) has dominated academic discourse for over 20 years and has been promulgated through the mechanisms of vocationalisation, massification and marketisation (Marginson, 1997). As the hegemonic project of neoliberalism enters its own existential crisis and becomes intensified (Ali, 2015), so have the impacts on individuals across the social spectrum. Neoliberal HE, however has its own peculiar double impact, making it worthy of attention for those wishing to resist the suffering it causes. Firstly – through the operation of vocationalisation and marketisation – HE contributes to the reproduction of neoliberal technocracy (Kincheloe, 2008), secondly – through the impact of massification (Houlbrook, 2009) – it contributes to the direct suffering of students. In the latter case this has arisen through the direct experiences of, so called, ‘non-traditional’ students within the discourse of ‘access’ and HE.

This paper outlines how some of these things operate in the experience of students in HE and argues a case for compassionate pedagogy, where kindness is a central theme. In doing so, the argument is made for both compassion as a logical counterpart to individual suffering (Ditrich, 2017) and as a platform for resistance to neoliberalism. The argument is further made that, if the aim of resistance is to promote social justice, then compassionate pedagogy needs to take a critical pedagogical form. The paper offers compassionate pedagogy as resistance, by drawing on research and practice in HE education settings of Social Work, Community Development and Adult Education (Houlbrook, 2019). It concludes by reviewing educational practices and strategies that could facilitate compassionate resistance to neoliberalism and its resultant suffering in and through HE.

Keywords: Compassionate pedagogy, hegemony, suffering, neoliberalism, critical pedagogy, kindness.

References


Neoliberal systems of governance and the management of Indigenous incarceration: interlocking practices for First Nations prisoners with multiple disadvantage and the effects on their children and young people and ways forward

Assoc. Prof Deirdre Howard-Wagner, Australian National University and Deborah Evans, Tjillari Justice Aboriginal Corporation.

There is growing recognition of the multiple disadvantage of First Nations detainees, which can include the effects of trauma and dispossession, poverty, disability and mental health issues and the likelihood of those factors to significantly impact on the lives of First Nations prisoners, families and communities across Australia. What is less recognised is the intergenerational effects of multiple disadvantage on the children of First Nations prisoners, who have higher rate of removal from families and likelihood of incarceration themselves. Furthermore, there is little discussion about the interlocking practices that keep children of First Nations prisoners at the margins of society and at risk of themselves becoming a child protection or prison statistic in the neoliberal age.

The paper reflects on First Nations peoples incarceration and multiple disadvantage and the effects on children and young people, but it also looks to innovative programs that one First Nations justice organisation has developed in an effort to change this cycle. While the program reinvigorates cultural practices, it is not focused on deficits and social suffering and healing trauma in the same way that many programs do, but instead focusing on reconnecting First Nations detainees to their children and First Nations detainees and their child with their identity, culture and community. The paper considers this innovation as practices of resistance, agency and empowerment through innovative Indigenous justice.

Countering neoliberalism through universal income and services for people with disability in Australia – lessons from the Blind Pension

Dr Jennifer Mays, Queensland University of Technology and Professor Karen R. Fisher, University of New South Wales

The long-term pursuit of neoliberal policies and austerity measures across developed Western industrial countries (such as Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America) has produced ever growing income and wealth inequalities. Rapidly burgeoning inequalities originate from the convergence between political institutions, social and economic forces, and belief systems (such as ‘meritocratic extremism’), perpetuating unequal wage and capital distribution. These conditions lead to the situation where the rate of return on capital far exceeds the growth rate of the economy leading to an unequal concentration of wealth at the top 1 per cent of economic power elites. Such an outcome of neoliberalism and austerity policy requires an alternative redistributive scheme (such as Universal Basic Income [UBI]) through redesigning the welfare (social) state and tighter fiscal controls (re-structuring the taxation system for a more progressive wealth tax). In the current economic and political climate, UBI represents a relevant progressive vision toward a fairer and just income support provision for all, most specifically for people with disabilities.

The highly targeted, conditional income support system and social service system in Australia makes it difficult to imagine steps towards implementing progressive alternatives such as UBI. An exception to Australia’s conditionality is the Blind Pension. Unlike the Disability Support Pension, the Blind Pension is available to any person who meets the
medical criteria, irrespective of income and labour market participation. Like the Aged Pension it is indexed to wages so it remains more adequate than other benefits. Policy analysis of the conditions which the Blind Pension has been retained could inform conditions that might generate political consent to trial a limited application of UBI for other people with disability. The paper analyses the historical conditions in which challenges to abolish or change the Blind Pension were resisted. It finds that, in the public imagination, living with blindness is distinguished from other policy classifications of disabilities, privileging continued unconstrained access to income support for people with vision impairment. The readiness with which the Australian public has recently embraced universal eligibility for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) for any people with significant and ongoing disabilities could indicate that the time is ripe to trial on UBI for people with disability that extends the favourable position of people eligible for the Blind Pension.

Insights from existing universal models help inform the reconfiguration of the social state and transitioning to an unconditional, UBI (as an essential just social policy instrument) for strengthening social protection and socio-economic security. Such a change needs to occur alongside the protecting, strengthening and defending the virtues of an egalitarian democratic society, and other vital public programs already in existence (universal Medicare health scheme). For UBI to be sustainable, it needs to align with the logic of policy initiatives and provide economic and social security and be grounded in social (distributive) justice.

Keywords: Neoliberalism, Universalism, Basic Income, Blind Pension, Social Services, Social Justice Policy

Corroding motherhood: gendered power and governance and supplicant identities in Australian post-separation relationships.

Associate Professor Kris Natalier, College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, Flinders University.

Divorce and separation hold within them a tension: they are ‘typically viewed as a social and legal process for disentangling legal lives’ (Elizabeth 2017, 1) but when there are children of the union, law and policy reinforce an ongoing relationship between parents. The legal and administrative processes that connect parents after separation can facilitate the gendered control of mothers by former partners and the state. Thus, it is important to attend to the abusive behaviours of individual men and the policies, laws and institutional practices that reinforce a former partner’s power and subject mothers to state control.

In this paper, I explore how post-separation governance of women, effected through Australia’s family law system, child support bureaucracy (Department of Human Services – Child Support (DHS-CS)) and welfare agency (Centrelink)) facilitates the state’s and men’s power to corrode mothering identities and practices. I conceptualise each bureaucracy as a node in an interconnected system of post-separation institutions and processes in order to map the systemic and gendered effects of what might otherwise seem to be unrelated policies. This is not to suggest that there are not contradictions and complexities in the formal articulation and practical application of these components of post-separation governance but rather, they constitute ‘a web-like enclosure in which [women] are "caught."’ (Sarat 1990). This enclosure draws single mothers into repeated interactions with their former partner and government workers and processes. It produces identities of welfare recipient, separated/sole mother and ‘ex’, each of which positions women as supplicants to the state and their former
partner. This has material effects, intensifying poverty or financial insecurity. As importantly, these processes corrode women’s capacity for autonomous action and undermine a central project and identity for many women - that of mothering.

References


‘We know how to play the government game, now’: Aboriginal community organisations negotiating and surviving the ‘Advancement’ Era, 2014–2019

*Alexander Page, PhD Candidate (Sociology), University of Sydney*

The introduction and rollout of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) in 2014 by the Abbott Coalition government dramatically altered the relationship between Aboriginal community organisations and the Commonwealth. The IAS repositioned the creation of Indigenous Affairs policy in a new centralisation into the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, resulting in a range of new measures designed to oversee the ‘rationalisation’ of the organisation-to-government relationship despite no prior consultation with the Indigenous Sector. This included implementation of immediate funding cuts, heightened accountability measures, and racialised auditing cultures through new contractual arrangements. The Strategy (2014–2019) represents only the latest turn in a heightened settler-colonial neoliberal public management in Indigenous Affairs policy – originating from the abolition of ATSIC in 2004-05 and continued by Commonwealth governments ever since – and is conceptualised here as a distinct ‘Advancement’ Era. Despite this transformation of the relationship between the Indigenous Sector and Commonwealth government in the ‘Advancement’ Era, Aboriginal community organisations continue to practice and deliver a unique social good for Aboriginal communities in specific cultural and socio-historical contexts through grassroots services, advocacy, and representation mechanisms. These Commonwealth processes have had a variety of effects upon Aboriginal community organisations: frontline workers have negotiated and fought for their survival to continue this practice whilst balancing their commitment to local community support and development in increasingly stressful circumstances during this period. This paper draws on in-depth interviews with 32 frontline workers in eight organisations in Western Sydney during the ‘Advancement’ Era (2016–2017) to highlight the day-to-day processes of negotiating and surviving this current policy reality that attempts to control and erode Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander civil society. I argue that the enabling and constraining nature of the organisation-to-government relationship, and the reflexive social action of frontline workers to the settler-colonial neoliberalism of the Commonwealth are correlated with organisational size, service delivery domain, raison d'être, and staff members’ personal histories of decolonising and anti-racist project making. Aboriginal community organisations in Western Sydney continue to actively negotiate this domination, paternalism, and homogenisation by unaccountable Australian governments and in doing so expose dual legitimacy crises of both neoliberal public management and settler-colonial authority and sovereignty.

**Keywords:** Aboriginal, organisation, frontline, governance, practice, race
Hope, Suffering and Resistance: Combatting the Cashless Debit Card

Dr Michelle Peterie and Prof Greg Marston, University of Queensland

Compulsory Income Management (CIM) sees a portion of welfare recipients’ social security payments quarantined for use on ‘essentials’ such as food and bills. Quarantined funds cannot be spent on prohibited items such as alcohol, illicit drugs and gambling services. One form of CIM – the Cashless Debit Card (CDC) – was introduced to the Federal Division of Hinkler in Queensland in January 2019. This CDC ‘trial’ saw approximately 6,000 welfare recipients aged 35 years and under placed on the CDC, regardless of their personal circumstances and financial capabilities. Previous studies of CIM have located these policies within a broader history of neoliberal paternalism, observing that such programs reflect contemporary preoccupations with job-seeker ‘activation’ and ‘mutual obligation’. While questions of power and coercion have been central to these analyses, acts of resistance have received comparably little scholarly attention. Drawing on in-depth interviews with welfare recipients in Bundaberg and Hervey Bay Queensland, this paper presents preliminary findings regarding individuals’ experiences on the CDC in the initial months of the card’s rollout. It highlights technical issues with the program’s implementation as well as deeper concerns regarding the corrosive impact of CIM on personal identity, autonomy and socio-emotional wellbeing. In addition, this paper documents and theorises important but previously under recognised forms of resistance within this punitive policy context. Numerous welfare recipients in the region have engaged in overt and clandestine forms of resistance, protest and class solidarity to fight the card and mitigate its more harmful effects. The significance and implications of this power/resistance nexus in the neoliberal context are interrogated and discussed.

Keywords: cashless debit card, compulsory income management, neoliberalism, power, resistance, welfare conditionality

Status-making: Rethinking migrant categorization

Dr Shanthi Robertson, Western Sydney University

Migrants are increasingly categorized with different ‘statuses’ – that is, classified, quantified, coded and placed into hierarchies that are politically and socially determined and have embodied and material effects. However, scholarly critiques of status often remain focused on legal descriptors and dichotomous categories such as refugee/migrant or legal/illegal. The concept of status in migration studies is thus most often used to statically classify differing modes of entry, and the subsequent rights, entitlements and vulnerabilities of migrant subjects. This paper argues for renewing understandings of migrant status as a process rather than a static signifier, in order to account for how the classification of migrants is dynamic (that is, variable over time and space), relational (that is, foundationally concerned with the creation of boundaries between different groups) and intersectional (that is, inextricably bound up with other categories of social difference). Drawing on multiple examples from media and scholarly literature on contemporary Australian migration, I seek to show how diverse and complex forms of migrant status are ‘made’ in relation to both voluntary and involuntary migrant mobilities – that is, how they are produced, contested and contestable across fluid legal, political, social and cultural lines. In doing so, I argue that a critical sociological orientation towards ‘status-making’, rather than uncritical categorizing of migrants into ‘types’, may be conceptually useful in contexts of immigration complexity.
Governing Disability Relations of Care in Australia’s Social Security System.

Assoc Prof Karen Soldatic, Western Sydney University and Michelle Fitts, La Trobe University

In this paper we explore the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers of family members living with disability many of whom live with some form of disability themselves. Almost a quarter (23.9%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians report living with a disability. While most of them are cared for at home by female family members, there is limited understanding and insight into their lives. This study explores caregiver experiences navigating the social security, health, disability and housing service systems. As a group, Indigenous women carers living with disability sit across multiple, complex and competing state classification regimes. Navigating such systems, and trying to ‘fit’ within each of the divergent regimes to maintain some type of minimum wellbeing for themselves, their household members living with disability alongside broader family, means that they are required to hold these systems of classificatory simultaneously. While there may be areas of overlap, their own status as being disabled and as carer is highly problematic as they often find themselves advocating for themselves as individuals in need, as an advocate for their family member living with disability, and less frequently, as a comprehensive care network, where each members supports the wellbeing of the household. Drawing upon a larger national study across the four regional centres from across Australia (WA, NSW, Queensland and Victoria), the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander caregiving experience traverses four themes of the impact of these classificatory systems on their daily lives: (i) Living in unsuitable accommodation, (ii) Caregiver responsibilities for the family, (iii) Challenges applying for and receiving financial support, (iv) Caregivers living with a disability, and (v) Extended medical processes, treatment and diagnosis.

Keywords: caregiving, disability, social security, financial costs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

The shifting state of Australian Welfare: Seeking a contextual understanding of the influence of Australia’s cashless debit card social policy in the lives of recipients and their communities.

Kristen Stevens (PhD candidate), University of South Australia.

Australia’s cashless debit card represents a unique form of paternalistic, neoliberal punishment aimed at people who do not fit the corresponding ideological mould. Little research has investigated people’s lived experiences of life with the cashless debit card, and no research has yet to address the complexities of how the card interacts with other policies and contexts of people’s lives. This investigation seeks to critically contextualise this lived experience of the card, in relation to broader policies and community factors in a remote country location, where 75% of card recipients are Aboriginal Australians.

Increasing welfare conditionality is becoming common-practice in staunchly paternalistic-neoliberal economies globally. Whilst there remains many versions globally of welfare conditionality employed to restrict, determine, and punish people in receipt of welfare
assistance, Australia was the first country to implement income management (IM) and the most restrictive version: the cashless debit card.

The Australian Governments cashless debit card policy allows 80% of a persons social security payment to be placed on a for-profit, privately managed corporations debit card (Indue), restricting the purchase of alcohol, gambling and pornographic products. Only 20% of this payment is allowed to be accessed as cash. Previous versions of IM saw less restrictive proportions, with IM initially introduced against human rights laws, in Australia’s Northern Territory in 2007. This was done as part of a response to the Little Children are Sacred Report. With staggered roll-outs beginning in 2016, the card is now delivered as an ongoing trial in communities in Western Australia, South Australia, and Queensland.

Guided by a critical ethnographic methodology, this project seeks to gain insight regarding how the card interacts with the broader contexts of people’s lives. No social policy exists in people’s lives in isolation; hence in addressing the influences of the card, this investigation seeks to capture the contextual complexities of how people operate in their day-to-day lives. This means addressing how the card and other policies interact and come to shape local culture, economic, social and opportunity contexts in a remote location. The purpose of addressing the influence of policy in this way is to better contextualise the evidence of impact – that is, to gain greater clarity of how people navigate their lives with the combination of punitive policies in a remote location, with the addition of racial inequality faced by many in the community.

This PhD project seeks to speak with all peoples in this town, be they in receipt of the card or not, over a period of approximately 12 months of spending time in community, visiting and conducting repeated, life-story interviews, which begun in March of 2019. Preliminary reflections will be reported on, along with discussion regarding directions for the project going forward.

Keywords: Income-management, cashless-debit-card, welfare, conditionality, policy.

Enabling and disciplining social and economic participation: How people with a partial capacity to work are governed at the intersection of Centrelink and the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building tier of the National Disability Insurance Scheme

Dr Louise St Guillaume, E.G. Whitlam Fellow within Western Sydney University

Although there are no access requirements under the Information Linkages and Capacity Building Policy Framework (the ‘Framework’) which means, in theory, that people with a partial capacity to work would be eligible to access this part of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether people with a partial capacity to work are accessing this tier, and how a system which is designed to facilitate the social and economic participation of people with disability governs people with a partial capacity to work alongside their mutual obligations as Newstart Allowance recipients. Newstart Allowance, it could be suggested, is also about social and economic participation. However, this is facilitated through contracts, demerit points and penalty zones. Distinct from the techniques of rule referred to in the ‘Framework’ which are designed to “enable greater access to the social and economic life of the community for people with disability, their families and carers” (National Disability Insurance Agency, 2019, p. n.p.). This paper, through applying governmentality and drawing on the findings of a policy analysis of
relevant documents, highlights how people with a partial capacity to work are governed at the intersection of the Australian social security system and the National Disability Insurance Scheme. It argues that the different ways in which they are governed are enabling and disciplinary simultaneously which could impede their social and economic participation. Furthermore, it emphasises how it is important to consider the ways in which policy intersections govern and shape people’s lives and how through drawing on Whitlam’s legacy we can genuinely support the social and economic participation of all Australians, including people with disability.

**Keywords:** Newstart Allowance, disability, National Disability Insurance Schemes

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**Arrested Development: Suicide or prison, are they the only options for Indigenous Australian youth?**

*Corrinne Sullivan, School of Social Sciences, Western Sydney University*

Many countries report higher rates of suicide mortality and incarceration of Indigenous populations compared to that of non-Indigenous people. In Australia, the suicide and incarceration rates of Indigenous Australians has reached alarming levels, particularly among youth. The underlying causes of high Indigenous suicide and incarceration rates have been linked to factors such as colonialism, unemployment, poverty, lack of education, and enduring racism. A range of social indicators and demographic data point to a mass of statistics and catalogues of ‘at risk’ factors which provide neither insight nor comprehension. This paper does not amount to an understanding of suicide or incarceration from ‘within’, but rather, is an explanation from ‘without’. It relies on concepts, classifications, comparisons, and descriptions to help us understand the contexts in which incarceration and suicide occur, in particular its severity and excess in relation to young Indigenous people.

**Toxic twins - the automation and privatisation of conditional welfare in Australia.**

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Following the theme of neoliberal systems of governance and the associated daily practices of managing, regulating and subordinating individuals, peoples and communities, this paper traces the genealogy of the automated and privatised delivery systems of income support payments in Australia, with specific reference to the Cashless Debit Card. It investigates the nature of these technological and administrative mechanisms, the political imperatives that underpin them, and the impact of digital welfare governance techniques on First Nations income support recipients.

Integral to the automation of the administration of income support payments, in the context of the rise of neoliberalism and globalisation, is the insertion of outsourcing and privatising mechanisms into the sphere of social welfare. The paper demonstrates that the increasing degree of automation and the concomitant privatising and outsourcing of aspects of the
administration of social welfare are integral accompaniments to the adoption of welfare conditionality, and are a manifestation of global and domestic ideological perspectives and attitudes towards those requiring income support.

The focus is on the political economy of automation and privatisation instruments of conditional welfare. Particular attention is paid to the enabling of increased surveillance of the private spheres of people’s lives and the erosion of agency, rights and control. Far from enhancing people’s rights in the name of digital inclusion and sovereignty, automation and privatisation serve to exploit and undermine people’s existing rights.

Attention is paid to the privatisation of aspects of government administrative services using taxpayer funded infrastructure – as established by a private company, Indue Ltd, which provides the payment transfer service for the Cashless Debit Card. Consideration is given to the potential monetisation of the data relating to the recipients of the Cashless Debit Card and the vested interests arranging themselves around this source of associated assets.

An examination is made of the extent to which the outsourcing of social welfare serves to privilege the interests of some over the needs and aspirations of others. The paper interrogates the political dynamics and ideological underpinnings the outsourcing of the administration of social welfare systems – privatization, accompanied by automation, is an integral component of an ideological strategy to realign institutions in such a way as to preference the goals of certain groups over the competing needs of others.

The use of automation and privatisation exemplify the neoliberal Australian Government’s attempt at using social welfare policy as a means to impose punitive behaviour modification models on those who they deem to be the ‘undeserving poor’, as evidenced by the imposition of behavioural conditionality and the use of coercion and automation in order to control and scrutinise those subjected to the Cashless Debit Card.

The paper concludes that – due to the government’s neoliberal fixation on efficiency, cost-cutting, and the need to control the private spheres of people’s lives – the toxic mix of the automation and privatisation of income support services has come at the expense of equity and decency and has resulted in increasing inequality and a punitive and discriminatory attitude towards those requiring income support.

Keywords: Automation, privatisation, welfare conditionality, Cashless Debit Card, digital sovereignty, surveillance.

Conditionality, classification, care. Experiences of the Cashless Debit Card Trial, Ceduna, South Australia.

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This paper concerns the lived experiences of individuals subject to the first Cashless Debit Card (CDC) trial in the Ceduna region of South Australia. First introduced into Ceduna in early 2016, the CDC quarantines 80 per cent of working age recipients’ income support payments in a selected trial site: 20 per cent of payments are deposited into the recipient’s bank account; the remainder is available on a debit card barred from operating at any alcohol or gambling outlet across Australia. Since mid 2017, I have been conducting ethnographic research into life
on the CDC, centring the voices of those Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people affected by the trial.

In general terms, we might understand the history of Aboriginal engagements with the welfare state in terms of a transition from exclusion to inclusion. But historian John Murphy details a long, tangled period from federation to the 1970s throughout which Aboriginal people are subject to regimes of ‘conditional inclusion’ into the welfare state. Murphy attends to a shifting classificatory schema whereby the basis of inclusion and exclusion first concerned ‘caste’ and then gave way to criteria based on behaviour and ‘civilised’ norms. The period of universal access to the provisions of the twentieth century welfare state was relatively short-lived. In 2007, the BasicsCard was introduced into the Northern Territory as part of the Intervention. The BasicsCard can be understood as a forerunner to the CDC: this instrument of compulsory income management involves quarantining a portion of recipients’ income support payments (usually 50 per cent) and its introduction necessitated suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975.

The CDC then represents an intensification in conditional and punitive welfare delivery, a development consistent with shifts across comparable post-Fordist economies. In a sense, it reconstitutes the history of racialised conditional inclusion, instead attaching conditions to how welfare is spent. These conditions are cast in moral/social terms rather than racial ones, however much the targeting of Aboriginal lives is glaringly apparent.

In grappling with all of the above, those placed on the CDC develop grounded theories of race, welfare, classification and conditionality. In the past, I have written of the restless reconstitution of a complex intra-Aboriginal distinction in this setting, which is governed through (Vincent 2018). But this is only part of the story. In this paper, I develop a nascent theory about a vernacular classificatory vocabulary through which my interlocutors sort people according to the work they do to care for others, or their orientation to their own fulfilment. Those who pursue life in the latter terms are sometimes rubbished but sometimes keenly felt for: their ‘agonies’, ‘worries’ and suffering are taken account of. These everyday methods of classification cut across the neoliberal classificatory models that renders citizens responsible/irresponsible and working/non-working, asserting the primacy of a powerful ethics of care for others.

**Keywords:** welfare, income management, cashless debit card, Indigenous policy, care

**References**


**Governing Precarity through Virtuosity: Expectations of positivity and resilience among persons crowdfunding medical expenses**

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Crowdfunding personal medical expenses has grown exponentially in recent years. Strikingly apparent in these narratives of appeal is an *insistence* on positive resolve, despite enormous
hardship. Hence, to garner requisite support, precarious subjects must curate archives of their upstanding character, poignant accounts of their suffering, and persuasive pleas for aid. This emotional and confessional labour amounts to a burdensome task. However, most efforts (almost 90%) fail to reach funding targets, thus generating injurious metrics of life’s worth. Moreover, the affordances of digital platforms exacerbate inequalities of social and cultural capital, for campaign success is heavily dependent on leveraging support networks, technical capabilities, and emotional nuance. Still, crowdfunding is one of the few ‘empathy paths’ available to many. Altogether, precarity is increasingly governed through virtuosity, a positive reframing of vulnerability which implies that those who prove themselves morally deserving will be redeemed. Yet, with occasional exceptions, these subjects must also remain ideologically compliant. That is, while often undeniable victims of structural injustice, it is difficult to express such views without potentially dividing the crowd and losing donations. To achieve recognition thus requires ‘exemplification’ and perpetuates a ‘violence of normativity’ (Berlant), where ‘citizen virtue becomes uncomplaining accommodation’ that ‘morally fuses hyperbolic self-reliance with readiness to be sacrificed’ (Wendy Brown). The ‘crowd’, alternatively, is free to voice their own ideological stances, often by appending donations with politically-charged sentiments. Crisis crowdfunding highlights that even ‘no-one is permanently excluded from the game of entrepreneurship’ (McNay). Instead, advocates must curate ‘sympathy biographies’ (Candace Clark), abide the ‘Tyranny of Positive Energy’ (Lovink and Rossiter), and become ‘spiritual bellhops’ in ‘the traffic in sorrow in grief’ (Elizabeth Spelman). Ultimately, this discursive-affective space suggests that life is ‘grievable’ (Butler) only when its moral worth can be made visible, virtuosic, instructive, and consumable.

Keywords: crowdfunding, moral worthiness, positive precarization, sympathy biography, grievability

Chronopolitics in robodebt

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Since 2016, current and former welfare recipients in Australia have been subject to the Online Compliance Intervention (OCI), implemented through the national income support agency, Centrelink. This is a big data initiative, matching reported income to tax records to recoup previous welfare overpayments. It is an element in a much larger process of digital transformation in service provision for the Australian state. The OCI proved controversial for several reasons, most notably a ‘reverse onus’, requiring claimants to disprove debts, and a data matching design leading to high numbers of false and inflated debts. The OCI is an instructive instance of algorithmic governance, directing attention to the chronopolitics of contemporary welfare bureaucracies. It outsources labor previously conducted by Centrelink to clients, compelling them to secure and submit documentation lest debts be raised against them. It imposes an active wait against a deadline on those issued debt notifications, formulated in this paper as ‘occupation of time’. Belying government rhetoric about the convenience and efficiency of the digital state, the OCI demonstrates how automation instantiates and exacerbates punitive welfare agendas, notably through transfers of time, money and labor whose combined effects are such as to occupy the time of people in poverty.