The fragmentation of poverty in the UK: what's the problem? A working paper

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Summary

Current representations of, and responses to, poverty in the UK policy landscape are becoming increasingly fragmented. Recent years have seen the emergence of new classifications to describe the manifestations of lacking sufficient financial income to meet essential needs, including, for example, period poverty; food poverty; funeral poverty and clothing poverty. In this article, we document how the related partial responses to poverty – such as free sanitary products, or a food parcel - have rapidly grown in scale, and how they are changing the consensus around how we tackle poverty in the UK. We employ Carol Bacchi's 'what's the problem represented to be' (WPR) approach to think through these issues, focusing on four poverty 'types': food poverty; period poverty; clothing poverty; and bed poverty. The working paper concludes by arguing that as the notion of poverty becomes increasingly fragmented, wider determinants of the distribution of resources remain unproblematised and the scope to challenge them is therefore diminished.

For more information on this working paper, and the wider context of it, please see https://www.whatstheproblem.org.uk/a-working-paper

Introduction

Recently, there has been an increasing focus on the emergence and problem of different 'poverties' by media and campaigning organisations. These can include – for example – discussions of 'food poverty', 'period poverty' and rising 'holiday hunger'. At the same time, the government has attempted to marginalise discussions of poverty, particularly child poverty, in the UK. The tensions in how we, as individuals and as a society, respond to campaigns that call for, for example, beds for children, emergency food packages for individuals and families, and sanitary products for women and girls, whilst at the same time aiming to tackle and solve poverty, are considerable. This is leading to increasingly fragmentary analyses and responses to poverty. Responding to the 'problem' of period poverty or food poverty with free sanitary products or a food parcel represents a partial fix, which can assist people living in poverty *temporarily*, but ultimately, are likely to mean that people continue to risk facing the chronic and multiple realities of poverty in the longer term because the underlying causes remain unaddressed.

We are interested in how these responses have grown rapidly in scale, predominantly in the past decade, and how they are changing the consensus around how we tackle poverty in the UK. To think through these issues, we employ Carol Bacchi's (1999, 2012a, 2012b) 'what's the problem represented to be' (WPR) approach to, focusing on four poverty 'types': food poverty; period poverty; clothing poverty; and bed poverty. These poverties and responses to them have expanded at a time of ongoing austerity measures that have seen poverty levels increase and a growing reliance on the third sector to meet basic needs as state provision retreats.

While we are concentrating on the contemporary period, and on the UK, it is important to recognise the extent to which historical engagements with poverty have often been tied to a narrower focus on one specific element or symptom of poverty. Categories of poverty have a longstanding history such as the 'deserving and 'undeserving' poor, 'ragged' and 'dangerous' classes (Himmelfarb, 1984: 381; Morris, 1994), as well as more recent foci on pensioner poverty, child poverty, fuel poverty and in-work poverty. Policy attention directed at child and pensioner poverty have often been more structural in nature, with interventions providing extra income to ameliorate the effects of poverty (see Dickens 2011 for a comprehensive discussion on the role that New Labour's welfare reforms played in reducing

child poverty between 1997 and 2010, and Joyce and Sibieta [2013] for a similar analysis of falls in both child poverty and pensioner poverty).

In the UK, the Child Poverty Action Group was formed in 1965. The decision to focus on 'child poverty' rather than poverty as a whole was part of a concerted attempt to increase public support for addressing the harm poverty causes, with a recognition that children in poverty might be more likely to attract public sympathy and concern than adults, who might too easily be dismissed as undeserving and so unworthy of support. Also in the 1960s, Martin Luther King critiqued the US Government's efforts to fight poverty, dismissing the 'categorical aid' programmes (which continue to exist today) as 'piecemeal and pygmy' (King, 1968: 171). He explained: 'the programs of the past all have…[a] common failing – they are indirect. Each seeks to solve poverty by first solving something else' (1968: 171). The danger, of course, is that by focusing attention on 'something else', the structural drivers of income-based relative poverty are neglected.

By using this paper to detail some concerns with a focus on one element or symptom of poverty (such as period or food poverty), our intention is not to discredit the work that is being done to address these issues; after all, there is a real and growing need for the myriad support being offered through charitable provision. Instead, we offer reflections on why individuals and organisations who are involved in documenting or ameliorating the effects and shortcomings of social and economic policies would be well placed to consider how a focus on these poverty types can mask wider structural issues. There is a danger that a focus on the symptoms of poverty not only conceals wider issues of inequality and injustice, but can also suggest hierarchies of deservingness and a resultant stigma and shame. For example, the rhetoric that proposes prioritising action to address in-work poverty appeals to persuasive notions of the unfairness of those who 'do the right thing' and yet still struggle to 'get by'. We suggest that these earlier and continued fragmentations of poverty might fit into wider notions of moral deservingness.

We argue instead for a revived focus on poverty as a lack of resources, rather than focusing on a lack of specific items, such as food, clothes, a suitable bed, or sanitary products. This is particularly relevant at a time when governments are proposing a 'new approach' to tackling child poverty (HM Government, 2011), when think-tanks and campaigners are urging us to 'rethink poverty' (Knight, 2017) and arguing it is time to 'tell a new story' about poverty in

the UK (Hawkins, 2018) – one which involves 'toning down the politics' (JRF, 2019) - or using a 'new poverty measure' (Social Metrics Commission, 2018). We would like to encourage more critical discussion about the implications of the increased fragmentation of poverty, as part of a wider exploration of how academics, anti-poverty campaigners, policy makers and stakeholders, can and do talk about poverty in the UK, and about their attempts to limit or indeed open up different narratives.

Poverty: what's the problem represented to be?

To support our exploration of the nature and consequences of an increased fragmentation of poverty, we draw upon the work of Carol Bacchi (1999, 2012a, 2012b) and, in particular, her 'what's the problem represented to be' (WPR) approach (Bacchi, 1999, 2012a, 2018). Influenced by Foucauldian post-structuralist thought, Bacchi (2012b) encourages an engagement with policy and governmentality that starts with the recognition that the public are governed – not primarily through policies – but through the problematizations that underpin these policies. This is tied to a conceptualisation of problems as fluid and changing, becomings not beings (Bletsas, 2012). For Foucault, a problem is "a creation in the sense that given a certain situation, you cannot infer that this kind of problematization will follow" (1985, cited in Bacchi, 2012b, p. 2).

Bacchi promotes "'problem' questioning as a form of *critical* practice" (emphasis in original, 2012a, unpaginated) and ties this practice to an engagement with policies as interventions designed to solve 'problems'. These can then be traced back (and are grounded in) a socially constructed problem representation. Starting with the policy proposals and interventions makes sense because: 'what one proposes to do about something reveals what one thinks is problematic (needs to change)' (Bacchi, 2012a, unpaginated). Bacchi further directs attention to the processes through which problem representations are 'produced, disseminated and defended' but also (sometimes) 'questioned, disrupted and replaced' (Bacchi, 2012a, unpaginated).

The WPR framework has great applicability and relevance to poverty, since anti-poverty policies are always underpinned by a particular representation of the nature, extent and location of the 'problem of poverty'. As Bletsas asks in her own engagement with poverty problem representations and WPR:

> ‘How did poverty come to be seen as a problem for governments and other experts to address? Why is it poverty, and not some related issue – inequality, wealth etc. – that has come to be seen as the ‘problem’? (2012, unpaginated).

In this article, we are concerned with understanding how the problematization of poverty has changed over recent years, how new and multiple forms of poverty (e.g. food poverty, period poverty, bed poverty) have emerged, and how these are themselves rooted in particular problematizations. We further want to explore the consequences of this changing problematization of poverty and its implications for policy and for wider understandings of poverty. To do this, we draw upon Bacchi’s WPR approach, not as a rigid formula, but as a form of critical thinking and engagement to direct and focus our lens on problem representations (as Bacchi (2012b) herself suggests). We do not work through all six of the questions that Bacchi proposes as helpful in subjecting any problem representation to scrutiny (see Bacchi 2012a, 2018), nor are we prescriptive about working backwards from policies to the problematization(s) in which these are rooted. Rather, we use Bacchi’s overarching proposition as a central thread, which runs through our discussion of the fragmentation of poverty and its implications for how policymakers and the public engage with (and seek to address) poverty. Throughout, we keep the following questions in mind (adapted from Bacchi (2012a, 2018)):

- When poverty becomes sub-divided into multiple poverties (period poverty, hygiene poverty, food poverty [and so on]), what is the ‘problem’ represented to be? And how is this different from a focus on poverty alone?
- What is left unproblematic in this problem representation?
- What effects are produced by these representations of the problem of multiple poverties?
- Can (and should) the problem of poverty be thought about differently?

To begin this process, we now turn to an exploration of the popular problem representation of poverty in the UK, and some of the ways in which this has fractured and changed in recent years.

The relative poverty consensus (rhetorically at least)

In the not so distant past, there appeared to be a remarkable consensus around the need to tackle relative poverty in the UK (Lansley, 2013). Whilst Leader of the Opposition, David Cameron (2006) wanted the ‘message to go out loud and clear, the Conservative Party

recognises, will measure and will act on relative poverty'. The Child Poverty Act, which received Royal Assent in 2010, progressed through Parliament with cross-party support, and included a 'headline' measure of 'relative child poverty'. The cross-party concern about relative poverty was, however, short-lived, and superficial, at best. In 2010, the newly formed Coalition government, led by the Conservatives, and following the financial crash of 2007-08, embarked upon a programme of austerity which relied heavily upon the 'ideological re-working' of austerity (Clarke and Newman, 2012: 300): 'a reworking that focused on the unwieldy and expensive welfare state and public sector, rather than high risk strategies of banks, as the root cause of the crisis.'

In 2011, the Coalition produced the first government child poverty strategy for England (the devolved administration of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland produced their own strategies), which promised 'a new approach to child poverty'. In keeping with the austerity narrative, it attempted to distance itself from the previous administration's approach to tackling child poverty, characterised by the Coalition as 'simply throwing money at the symptoms' (HM Government, 2011: 12) and getting individuals just over the 'poverty line', or 'poverty plus a pound' as Nick Clegg (2010) called it. In its place, the Coalition promised 'life-changing policies that will help families to lift themselves out of poverty' (2011: 63), which drew heavily on the 'pathways to poverty' approach advocated by the 'independent' think tank, the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), established by the former Conservative Party leader Iain Duncan Smith. The 'new approach' was supported by a consultation in 2012 to find 'better measures' of child poverty which would weaken and potentially side-line the income-based indicators in Child Poverty Act. At this time, no new measures were introduced, but it was not long before a move to 'strengthen' child poverty measures was announced (HM Government, 2015). This move would see the replacement of the income based, relative child poverty measure with two new measures: (i) the proportion of children living in workless households as well as long-term workless households; and (ii) the educational attainment of all pupils and the most disadvantaged pupils at age 16.

The Work and Welfare Reform Act 2016 saw large swathes of the Child Poverty Act rescinded, with the targets for 'eradicating' child poverty effectively abolished. The name of the Act was even retrospectively changed to the Life Chances Act. Whilst child poverty statistics would continue to be collected and published by the government, there was no

longer an obligation to report them to Parliament. New reporting obligations on the above two measures were introduced, along with reporting obligations on progress made by families on the government's Troubled Families Programme. In contrast, the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act (2017) restored and added to the 2010 measures, highlighting the divergence of government responses to the problem of poverty.

The percentage of children living in relative poverty is predicted to increase to 36.6 per cent by 2020-21 (Hood and Waters, 2017: 15). Analysts have highlighted how austerity measures are driving this increase (Hood and Waters, 2017). In November 2018, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty, Philip Alston noted that the UK had no 'official measure of poverty'(2018: 15-16), which allowed the government to highlight falling levels of 'absolute poverty' and to emphasise the increasing numbers of people in work, despite other measures showing and predicting increases in relative poverty. He reported that government austerity-driven policies around welfare and poverty were characterised by a 'punitive, mean-spirited, and often callous approach apparently designed to instil discipline' (Alston, 2018: 3) amongst low-income families, and that ministers were 'unconcerned' by his findings (*The Guardian*, 2018).

With the political consensus fracturing, organisations outside of Parliament have called for a new consensus to emerge. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) have called for a 'consensus that poverty in the UK is real, causes harm and is solvable' (JRF, 2016) and have produced a long-term all-age anti-poverty strategy. The Social Metrics Commission (SMC), which, despite several very close links to former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Iain Duncan Smith and the CSJ, proclaims itself as 'an independent and rigorously non-partisan organisation dedicated to helping policy makers and the public understand and take action to tackle poverty' (SMC, 2018: 1), published a report in 2018, offering a new poverty measure for the UK that could 'be used to build a consensus around poverty measurement and action in the UK' (2018: 2).

At the same time, some organisations and politicians have been proposing new solutions to poverty, with campaigning and civil society individuals and groups arguing that we need to 'rethink poverty' (Knight, 2017) or 'tell a new story' about poverty in the UK (Hawkins, 2018).

Social policy academics and other members of a so-called 'poverty lobby' (Knight, 2017: 73) have been implicitly blamed for the lack of progress that has been made in tackling poverty in these narratives. The foreword to the book *Rethinking Poverty* states that 'traditional social policy is inadequate to deal with the challenges facing the UK' (Knight, 2017: viii) and the back cover of the book states that 'social policy has failed to find answers' to the problems of poverty and inequality. Abigail Scott Paul, Deputy Director of Advocacy and Public Engagement at the JRF has argued that 'the fact that poverty figures in this country have stayed broadly the same for the past 25 years suggests that anti-poverty campaigners might be missing the spot' and that the organisation will 'need to work with storytellers to craft more effective narratives for social change' (Scott Paul, 2017).

The rhetorical consensus about the need to tackle income-based relative poverty has thus unravelled: new approaches have been proposed, new measures have been adopted, calls for a 'new consensus' can be heard, new 'stories' are being told, 'traditional' approaches have apparently failed, and new poverties are emerging. There may no longer be a requirement for the government to report child poverty statistics to Parliament, but debates about period poverty, food poverty and hygiene poverty have increased in recent years, accompanied again by campaigning and research activity around these terms and others. Set against this context, we want to encourage a more critical conversation about the functions and consequences of the changing way poverty is being talked about, represented and problematised in the UK. To do this, we have examined the emergence and representation of four poverty types, which we briefly set out below.

The fragmentation of poverty – a brief exploration of four poverty types

To develop our understanding of how poverty is today represented and reported, focus here on four poverty 'types': food poverty; period poverty; clothing poverty; and bed poverty. There are others that we could have chosen: for example, funeral poverty, hygiene poverty, beauty poverty, fuel poverty, teacher poverty. and even pet poverty. In choosing the four that we have, we have tried to include poverties with a longer history (most notable here is food poverty) as well as those with a much shorter period of usage (period and bed poverty). We summarise the emergence and naming of each of these poverties, and common responses to the problem they are seeking to highlight. We then draw out some key themes

within these responses, focusing on the ways in which a fragmented and partial definition of poverty promotes a fragmentary and partial response.

Food poverty

With the rise of food banks in the UK, food poverty has become synonymous with the face of everyday poverty. Food poverty is often used as a proxy when talking about poverty, with stock food bank pictures regularly used in newspaper articles about austerity. Yet accessing charitable food provision does not equate to being in food poverty, as not everyone experiencing low income or, indeed, a lack of food will access such provision, and not everyone accessing a foodbank at a time of crisis will be living in poverty. Importantly, access to charitable food aid is contingent on conditional factors. For instance, access to support is dependent upon the discretion of those who refer people in need to a food bank, as they are required to make the assessment of who is considered to be in an 'emergency' or crisis situation. As Trussell Trust networks of food banks are often located in religious settings (as are many independently run food banks), this potentially adds an additional barrier to access.

In one response to the problem of food poverty, a cross-party group of MPs and peers established a charity called Feeding Britain, to tackle hunger in the UK. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, is the President of the charity and one of its trustees is Baroness Jenkin, who in 2014, claimed that 'poor people are going hungry because they can't cook' (Holehouse, 2014). Feeding Britain were one of seven charities that were successful in securing government funding to run free holiday activities and meals for disadvantaged families in 2018 to tackle 'holiday hunger', a 'condition that occurs when a child's household is, or will, become food insecure during the school holidays' (Graham et al., 2016).

What is also notable about responses to food poverty is the growing role played by the private sector, perhaps best captured in the £20 million partnership between Trussell Trust, ASDA and FareShare (Trussell Trust 2018). This parallels similar initiatives in the USA (Fisher 2017). Indeed, ASDA is owned by the US corporate giant Walmart, who have donated more than $100 million to the Feeding America campaign since 2005, but whose own workers sometimes have to use food banks.

Period poverty

According to *The Guardian*, 'period poverty' was first discussed in Holyrood, home of the Scottish parliament, in September 2016, when an officer from the Trussell Trust 'called on the SNP government to consider making feminine hygiene products available free to women in receipt of certain targeted benefits' (Brooks, 2016). The call received cross-party support and, two years later, in August 2018, the Scottish government announced that 'colleges and universities across Scotland will have access to free sanitary products as part of a £5.2m scheme to fight period poverty' (Khomami, 2018). This provision has since been expanded to give local authorities additional funds to provide free products in venues such as libraries and leisure centres (BBC News, 2019).

The term 'period poverty' was first used in the UK Parliament on 16 March 2017 (Hansard, 2017). Paula Sherriff, the Labour MP for Dewsbury, stated:

> You may be aware, Mr Speaker, that I have campaigned on periods and have, within that, looked at period poverty. I recently spoke to BBC Radio Leeds, which highlighted that in that city, a significant number of girls are playing truant because they do not have any sanitary protection around the time of their period. One can only imagine the indignity that that causes. May we have a debate in Government time on whether there is anything that we can do to provide sanitary protection for low-income families and those who simply cannot afford it in these days of austerity?

The discussion and subsequent media coverage sparked a response from three friends which has developed into the *Red Box Project*, a nationwide volunteer-led response. *Always*, the feminine product manufacturer (and part of the multi-national consumer goods corporation *P & G*), launched a campaign in March 2018, in partnership with the *Red Box Project,* to '#EndPeriodPoverty', which included a donation to 'UK schools in most need' for every pack of Always Ultra towels purchased. Around five million pads were donated in the first three months of the campaign. *The Guardian* carried an article urging readers to 'make period poverty history' (Abbott, 2018), a significant reduction in ambition from the original, 2005 'make poverty history' campaign. There has also been a campaign called *On the Baw*, to get football clubs, originally in Scotland but now across the UK, to provide free sanitary products in their stadia (Kennedy, 2018), and a sponsored 'Tampon Taxi' in London, as part of social media campaign by an organisation called *Project Period*.

Clothing poverty

> "Five years ago it would have been inconceivable to think food banks – and the poverty that leads families to them – would be a normalised part of towns and cities up and down this country. Five years from now, will we say the same about clothes banks?" (Frances Ryan, February 2016, *The Guardian*)

As with foodbanks, clothing banks have been established by the voluntary sector to fill gaps in state provision. Recent research on destitution (JRF 2018) found that over 1.5 million people experienced destitution in the UK at some point during 2017, meaning they could not afford to buy the essentials that are required to eat, stay warm and dry, and keep clean. Food was cited as the most commonly-lacked item, with 62 per cent within the group reporting that they had gone without over the past month, but 46 per cent lacking suitable clothing. Although less discussed than food poverty, the concept of 'clothing poverty' has become another signifier of need that is being addressed by charitable provision. The issue is not always termed 'clothing poverty', but instead newspaper articles often discuss clothes banks (see Ryan, 2016).

As with some of the responses to holiday hunger, schools are at often the forefront of dealing with clothing poverty. School uniform banks and schemes designed to 'poverty proof' the school day have grown in number. Turner (2018) has highlighted that 'some schools told how they keep a washing machine and tumble dryer on site, as well as clean underwear for pupils who are sent to school wearing dirty garments', and that, according to one survey, around 16 per cent of schools run a clothes bank. The Church of England (2018) have said that school uniform 'banks', often working alongside other projects in churches such as food banks and breakfast clubs, are attracting more donations and providing help to an increasing number of parents. Recent reports suggest some uniform banks are experiencing overwhelming demand, leading to some Members of Scottish Parliament calling for schools to ban unnecessary or excessively expensive items from their uniforms (BBC News 2018).

Like food poverty and the accessing of a foodbank, there can be a conditional element to accessing support from a clothing bank or school uniform bank. Similar to Trussell Trust foodbanks, which operate on a voucher referral system, to access clothes from Sharewear, a clothing charity in Nottingham, people must be referred by charities and government

agencies such as Citizens Advice Bureau, foodbanks, and Jobcentre Plus. The charity was established by five Catholic women and the home page of their website includes a quotation from the Bible - 'I was naked and you clothed me' (Matthew 25:36). The Edinburgh School Uniform bank also requires referral from a suitable professional or community group (Edinburgh School Uniform Bank 2018). This conditional approach risks notions of deservingness being central to provision, with those deemed unsuitable then also unable to access lack support.

Bed poverty

Bed poverty is perhaps best described as a further fragmentation of 'furniture poverty', with the latter defined by the End Furniture Poverty (2018) campaign as:

> "the inability to afford or access the basic essential items that provide a household with a decent quality of life and the ability to participate in the norms of society. If somebody does not have access to basic appliances and items of furniture that they need to meet a minimum standard of living then they are classed as being in Furniture Poverty."

The emergence of bed poverty as a specific term occurred in 2018 and was tied to the launch of the 'Beds for Kids' campaign by charity Buttle UK. This campaign sought to draw attention to the situation faced by children who do not have a bed on their own (something, which the charity estimated affects as many as 400,000 children across the UK) (Buttle UK, 2018a). The campaign featured partnerships with beds manufacturer 'Dreams' and *The Sun*. While the charity did not explicitly talk about 'bed poverty' on their website or in the press releases produced to support the campaign, the term was employed by the media which reported the charity's findings. For example, BBC News (2018) ran a story with the headline ''Bed poverty' impacts thousands, says charity Buttle UK', while Inside Housing (2018) covered the campaign under the headline: ''Bed poverty' impacting thousands, charity warns'. The bulk of the coverage was in *The Sun*, which led its feature on the campaign with the banner: 'WAKE UP CALL: Half a million British children don't have their own bed so help us change that with our Beds For Kids campaign' (Harrison, 2018)

The Sun did not explicitly name the problem as 'bed poverty', but called on its readers to help make a difference to the lives of children without a bed of their own. Their campaign asked people to get involved by i) buying a bed from Dreams Beds (for every bed bought, the

company promised to donate a bed or mattress to Buttle UK); ii) donating directly to the campaign; or iii) buying a specially created book 'That's No Place to Sleep' (available to purchase at Dreams Beds stores), with proceeds going to the campaign (Harrison, 2018). In this way, the campaign presented a problem of children going without beds and then offered a solution in terms of charitable responses, which would then be bolstered through supportive input from the private sector.

What is notable about the genealogy of 'bed poverty' (as with 'period poverty') in the UK is the extent to which it is being mobilized as a campaigning tool, if not explicitly by the charity running the campaign, then by the media in its engagement with the campaign itself. To apply for a grant from Buttle UK for a free bed, individuals must have a support worker (who will make the application on their behalf) and then must meet stringent eligibility conditions. These state that:

> "applicants must have already exhausted all other sources of public funds for which they are eligible, including their Local Authority's Welfare Provision Scheme" (Buttle UK, 2018b).

With this example, we see how conditionality underpins charitable responses in ways that will exclude certain people from accessing support, while a narrow focus on 'bed poverty' implicitly ignores wider issues of the management of poverty in the longer-term.

Fragmenting poverty, fragmentary responses

The four case studies detailed here show the ways in which a fragmented and partial analysis of poverty is tied to fragmented responses. There are particular commonalities across the four case studies that we now briefly pull together. In doing so, we draw on relevant, available literature which documents and engages with fragmentary responses to poverty. Inevitably, given that food poverty has been a focus of political, academic and charitable attention for longer, there is significantly more literature on this than on our other case studies of fragmentary poverty types. However, the themes within the food poverty literature have wider resonance to all of our case studies. In this exploration, following Bacchi (1999), we are focusing on the ways in which a 'problem representation' of various

poverty types can lead to very particular effects, which demand close reflection and interrogation.

In terms of common themes discernible across the four case studies, firstly, charitable responses to these forms of poverty are underpinned by new and overlapping forms of conditionality that sit alongside and co-exist with the punitive welfare conditionality that dominates the social security landscape (see Dwyer et al. in their Welfare Conditionality project, 2018). The bed poverty and food poverty examples illustrate this particularly well. There is an urgent need to better understand how these additional forms of conditionality are experienced, the ways in which they can promote a narrow understanding of deservingness, exclude people in need from accessing support, and add to and extend the stigma of benefits receipt.

Secondly, the shift towards charitable provision that we witness with regards to responses to each of these poverty types represents a fragmentation of people's expectations of the state and its responsibilities to citizens, thus undermining social citizenship. The role of charity and religion in some of the responses (specifically around food poverty and clothing poverty) also speaks to a wider issue of who is responsible for providing basic needs such as food and clothing. A report by Independent Food Aid Network and the Trussell Trust (2017) found that volunteers across the UK are giving 'at least £30 million' a year in unpaid work to support food banks, with volunteers doing almost three million hours of unpaid work each year distributing food. The role of volunteers as providers of charitable food has been questioned by Poppendieck (1998) who has warned in a US context that charitable responses can become normalised, and the inequality embedded in them risks becoming legitimated. Charity is not offered to social equals; thus, recipients remain separate from volunteers in terms of both status and expectations resulting in 'social honour … to those who volunteer; stigma to those who are clients' (Poppendieck 1998: 254).

As well as the growing role of the charitable sector in responses to each of these poverty types, we have also witnessed an increased involvement of the private sector through corporate partnerships such as that between ASDA and the Trussell Trust, *Always* and Red Box (period poverty), and between *Dreams* and *Buttle UK* (bed poverty), which often aim to distribute products to alleviate shortages of specific goods. These corporate partnerships are an opportunity for big business to be seen to 'do good', acquire 'social honour', and are part

of broader strategies and programmes of corporate social responsibility and reputation management. With responses to food poverty, a shift towards a corporatisation of hunger signals further issues with the provision of food through charitable means. Writing in a North American context, Fisher (2017) describes how a self-perpetuating "hunger industrial complex" is an inherent part of the emergency food system. Fisher's ideas could be extended to corporate responses to period, clothing and bed poverty in the UK. Significant too are the ways in which the growing role of corporations in responses to forms of poverty makes possible the further retreat of the state. With each of the poverty types, we see responses that involve individuals, local authorities, voluntary sector organisations, and private sector companies in various ways, but often instead (and in place) of an active role for central government. With period poverty, for example, responses are being developed at the micro and local levels, as well as with the involvement of large multinational corporates. The Scottish Government have made a significant intervention here, and indeed the particular responses by devolved as well as the Westminster governments to each of these poverty types merits further attention. How far does a focus on these poverty types engender a partial response by policymakers, that focuses too narrowly and allows an obscuring (and even concealing) of the broader drivers of poverty?

Focusing upon charitable responses to poverty, albeit temporary and necessary, to meet need is, however, problematic. Poppendieck has described food banks as a 'moral safety valve' which 'reduce[s] the discomfort evoked by visible destitution in our midst by creating the illusion of effective action and offering us myriad ways of participating in it. It creates a culture of charity that normalizes destitution and legitimates personal generosity as a response to injustice, rather than encouraging systemic change (1998: 26-27).' Mostly, responses to the fragmentation of poverty are the provision of goods and not cash – a notable example of this is A Menu for Change in Scotland, who ran a three year project with a focus on 'Cash, rights, food'. In many ways, the provision of goods rather than cash can reflect wider moral concerns over the individualisation of poverty, and how people on a low income spend their money. This has been particularly evident in discussions around food bank use, with suggestions that people are choosing to spend their money on iPhones, cigarettes, and large screen televisions instead of food having popular currency and purchase (Garthwaite, 2016). The question of choice (or indeed the lack of it) is especially

important here. Food banks rely on donations from the public, and there is often little choice when it comes to the products being handed out in a food parcel. Further, as charitable, fragmentary provision increases across diverse poverty types, there is a risk that this leads to a retreat from recognising the necessity of providing money to alleviate poverty. Where services and goods replace income transfers, there is the consequent and inevitable linked risk that individuals experiencing poverty have reduced scope to choose how to spend their limited income. Speaking about the rise of poverty types, Bridget Phillipson, Labour MP for Houghton and Sunderland South, said:

> "Various colleagues have led immensely well-intentioned and often successful campaigns to draw attention to the cost of feeding children in the school holidays, when free school meals aren't there to eke out the budget. They have highlighted the cost of sanitary products for women, especially students. But 'holiday hunger' and 'period poverty' campaigns, rather like the earlier notion of fuel poverty, leave me a little uneasy. Poverty is something that affects people, not specific goods."
>
> (Phillipson, 2018)

Finally, in pulling these case studies together, what is also notable is the extent to which poverty types are here being mobilised and worked on as campaigning tools, and as mechanisms for seeking to elicit a compassionate response on behalf of the public in general and the potential charitable donor (or responsible consumer), in particular. For example, the case study of bed poverty shows the naming and reporting of one consequence of poverty in order to elicit a charitable response from potential supporters of the campaign. It is therefore problem representation as campaigning tool. These campaigns are often case studies of mixed economies of welfare, with individuals, small charities or 'start-ups' collaborating with large multi-national corporations and media companies, attempting to work alongside or in place of diminishing state provision. The myriad responses to 'food poverty', including two MPs setting up a charity to bid for government funding to tackle 'holiday hunger' amongst children, provides perhaps the best example of this fragmented, uncoordinated and 'essentially minimalist' (Levitas, 2012) approach whereby structural inequalities and the lack of income that is most likely at the root of these problems remain largely uninterrogated.

A focus on one symptom or dimension of poverty neglects the overall structural context of poverty, as well as the broader macro forces driving patterns of poverty and the

disproportionate risks of poverty faced by particular groups (for example, women, disabled people, and carers). If we look at period poverty, for example, we see how the various responses almost never highlight the gendered nature of poverty more widely, or the fact that there is a disproportionate burden placed on women in attempts to ameliorate the effects of poverty. Women, at all stages of their lives, are at greater risk of poverty than men, and their experience of poverty is likely to be more acute (Women's Budget Group, 2018). The role of government has also been side-lined, with very few of the fragmentations discussed here making links between specific symptoms or consequences of poverty and the political decision-making and sustained structural inequalities that are the primary cause of poverty. Activity thus far has largely been focused on acquiring resources and securing donations rather than holding the powerful to account or demanding social justice.

Discussion and conclusions

We return now to the first question framed by Bacchi's WPR approach: When poverty becomes sub-divided into multiple poverties (period poverty, hygiene poverty, food poverty [and so on]), what is the 'problem' represented to be?

In 2010, efforts to 'eradicate' child poverty in the UK by 2020 were enshrined in law. Just six years later, this legally binding commitment was repealed. As we approach 2020, government efforts to eradicate poverty are almost non-existent in England (although not Scotland) and, in their place, fragmented responses from individuals, civil society groups, social enterprises, campaigners and multi-national corporations have emerged. In less than a decade, we have moved from rhetorical cross party support for ending child poverty, to a government accused of being 'unconcerned' about poverty and destitution, and to relying on football clubs and schools to provide sanitary products for girls and women experiencing period poverty. The focus of activity has shifted from ending poverty to addressing more specific 'poverties', such as clothing poverty, period poverty, and food poverty, often through voluntary clothing, food, or baby banks. No doubt some English politicians would find such responses 'rather uplifting' (Peck, 2017) and evidence of the 'Big Society in action', but we find such developments potentially very problematic.

In thinking through what is problematic in this problem representation, we argue that as the notion of poverty becomes increasingly fragmented, wider determinants of the distribution

of resources remain unproblematised and the scope to challenge them is diminished. Campaigns to end 'furniture poverty' or to 'make period poverty history' portray the problems as separate issues which can be addressed through voluntary work and separate awareness raising campaigns. Some issues, just as some groups, are deemed 'worthy' of support, whilst other, presumably less worthy and deserving, forms of deprivation have not yet been highlighted by campaigners and philanthropists. While campaigns attempt to improve the situation for individuals and families living in poverty and improve some aspects of the material deprivation that they experience, they are often unable to challenge the structural inequalities that lead to such deprivation.

This leads us to the question of what can and should be done differently. Schram (2002), in discussing politically engaged scholarship, and specifically the work of Piven and Cloward, makes the distinction between conventional incrementalism and radical incrementalism. The former 'works within the existing bounds of acceptable political discourse, does not question its underlying assumptions and works within that context to make minor improvements in existing public policy' (Schram, 2002: 100). The latter, by contrast, does not accept the 'conventional bounds, assumptions, contexts and limits' and instead:

> "Pushes for the reluctantly granted concessions that not only improve the immediate circumstances of those most harmed by existing policy, but also lay the basis for building upon that success for even greater changes in the future, which can over time cumulatively result in the transition beyond the current limits-constraining policy".

At present, the sporadic, fragmented responses discussed here risk being examples of conventional incrementalism, charitable responses which become assimilated into mainstream service provision in lieu of an adequate system of social security. Nelson Mandela argued that overcoming poverty was an act of justice, not a gesture of charity, and Veit-Wilson (2000, 144) has noted that the responsibility for ending poverty ultimately rests with governments:

> "Ensuring that all the members of society, residents in or citizens of a nation state, have enough money is a clear role which governments can adopt or reject, but they cannot deny they have the ultimate power over net income distribution."

As activists, campaigners and researchers, it is important that we think carefully about how we engage with these new 'types' of poverty. In highlighting these representations and offering a response to them, it is not our intention to criticise them. Where state policies lead to the impoverishment of millions of people, and policies that deliberately and disproportionately affect the most disadvantaged sections of our society are vigorously pursued, it is, of course, essential that alternative forms of support and assistance are available to help those that require them. We do, however, wish to highlight the potential 'cost of good intentions' (Schram, 2002: 70), and we also wish to consider the implications for researchers and activists who are involved in documenting the effects of social policies and/or offering alternatives to the existing political agenda. We also want to open up and encourage discussion about the changing ways we problematise and address poverty in the UK. This has undergone rapid – and in some ways unprecedented change in the UK context – and the consequences of this (and its underpinning problem representation) needs to be more fully understood. The neoliberal economist Milton Friedman famously noted that it was only at times of crisis that real change occurred, and that the actions taken to address the crisis depended on the ideas that were 'lying around' at the time (1982: 7). All of us who believe in a just, equitable and sustainable society need to keep advancing and promoting some more ambitious alternatives to the approaches discussed here.

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