School-to-work transition services: Marginalising 'disposable' youth in a state of exception?

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Disadvantaged young people often inhabit a dangerous space: excluded from education, training and employment markets; constructed as disposable; and cast out as 'human waste' (Bauman, 2004). There are many macro-level analyses of this catastrophic trend, but this paper provides insights into some of the everyday educational micro-practices which contribute to such marginalisation. It presents findings from a study of a national school-to-work transition service in England, in a context not only of neo-liberal policies but also of severe austerity measures. The data reveal processes of triage, surveillance and control – driven by governmental and institutional targets – which denied many young people access to the service, including some of the most vulnerable. Beneath a rhetoric of social inclusion, the service in fact acted as a conduit into a dangerous space of exclusion. Drawing on the work of Butler and of Agamben, the article argues innovatively that such practices may represent an encroaching state of exception, in which more or less subtle forms of governmentality are gradually being supplanted by the more overt exercise of sovereign power.

Keywords: school-to-work transitions, youth, social exclusion, homo sacer, state of exception

A dangerous space for 'disposable' youth

Many scholars have outlined the ways in which 'the new capitalism' (Sennet, 2006) has transformed economic and social conditions since the oil crisis of 1973 and the global recession it provoked. Neo-liberal policies have promoted economic competitiveness rather than welfare of citizens as the primary task of governments, shifting the risk and responsibility for lifelong education, employment and well-being to individuals (Bauman, 2004). This process has accelerated in recent years, as crises of overproduction and of finance capital have limited capital accumulation, leading to a strategy of 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey, 2003). This notion refers to massive reductions in spending on health and social services, the appropriation of

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pension funds, and the marketization or privatization of 'the living space' (Harvey, 2006) – those areas of work, including education, dedicated to social reproduction. Since the financial crash of 2008, this crisis has deepened rapidly, to become the most severe since the Great Depression of the 1930s (Allman, 2010). Some of the most advanced capitalist countries around the globe are now imposing harsh austerity measures; in the UK, this is threatening the very existence of the welfare state.

A key consequence of this crisis has been the growth of unemployment and precarious, low-paid work, creating large communities of 'unemployable and invalid' people (Bauman, 2004, p. 51) condemned to the status of 'human waste':

> The production of 'human waste' [...] is an inescapable side-effect of *order-building* (each order casts some parts of the extant population as 'out of place', 'unfit' or 'undesirable') and of *economic progress* (that cannot proceed without degrading and devaluing the previously effective modes of 'making a living' and therefore cannot but deprive their practitioners of their livelihood) (original italics).

In order to legitimate these changes, the moralistic rhetoric of the 'underclass' is invoked to pathologise the most disadvantaged, and present them as '*the* blockage to future global competition and national economic prosperity' (Skeggs, 2004, p. 79, original emphasis; see also Levitas, 2005). Bauman draws on Agamben's (1998) notion of the *homo sacer*: a person who is expelled to a dangerous space at the margins of civil society, and to whom legal rights no longer apply. He claims that such persons have become

> … things excluded – thrown out of focus, cast in the shadow, forced into the vague or invisible background – [they] no longer belong to 'what is'. They have been denied existence (Bauman, 2004, p. 18).

Insofar as state expenditure on public services is obliged to continue to some degree, its purpose is increasingly shifted away from care and towards control (Harvey, 2003), that is, away from a focus on meeting human needs, and towards the surveillance and control of suspect populations:

> Repression increases and replaces compassion. Real issues such as a tight housing market and massive unemployment in the cities – as causes of homelessness, youth loitering and drug epidemics – are overlooked in favour of policies associated with discipline, containment and control. (Giroux, 2002, cited in Bauman, 2004, p. 85)

Young people, especially those in poverty, have been particular targets of these discourses:

> This is a generation of young people who have been betrayed by the irresponsibility of their elders and relegated to the margins of society, often in ways that suggest they are an excess, a population who, in the age of rampant greed and rabid individualism, appear to be expendable and disposable. (Giroux, 2009, p. xi)

As young people bear the brunt of social disadvantage and economic poverty, Giroux (2009) argues that the dominant construction of their position has changed: it used to be an ambiguous one, denoting both hope for a better future and a threat to society as a whole; now it is one simply of threat. Young people are demonised by the mass media and by politicians alike (Colley & Hodkinson, 2001; Osler and Starkey, 2005; O'Toole, 2007), referred to in terms such as '[f]eral youths … living outside the boundaries of civil society' (Sargeant, 2009). Such discourses create popular support

for 'discipline, containment and control' of these disadvantaged young people, in the form of surveillance and policing.

Portrayals of youth as 'feral' fail to link their social problems to the lack of opportunities they face in their transitions from school to work. Recent European studies point to the shortcomings of current metaphors such as 'navigating uncertainty' or following 'crazy paving' pathways. They refer instead to 'yo-yo' transitions, in order to convey the precariousness of young people's lives and represent more graphically the way that many of them recurrently attempt to enter the labour market, but often remain afflicted by poverty, and are pushed out again by structural inequalities and employer discrimination (DuBois Reymond & Lopez Blasco, 2003; Fahmy, 2007). Even before the current economic crisis first hit in 2008, an OECD report (2008) showed that youth unemployment was increasing sharply in Britain, that the labour market was strongly polarised against lower-qualified youth, and that many young people were employed only in precarious, short-term jobs. By July 2011, youth unemployment had reached almost one million (13.5 per cent of 16-24 year olds), the highest level ever recorded in the UK, while 2.6 million more were 'economically inactive' [1] (Kingsley, 2011; ONS, 2011). Yet in this context, employment has become vaunted by policy-makers as the prime solution to social exclusion (Levitas, 2005), and 'employability' has become the main policy objective for youth support initiatives (Colley, 2003a). Young people have become subject to a 'Catch 22' which disciplines and punishes them for not being employed, although very little employment is available for them. Moreover, 'exclusion' is conceived of narrowly as a condition of those who suffer it, rather than as the practices of those more powerful groups who do the excluding (Macrae, Maguire, & Milbourne, 2003). These processes illustrate a point made in the editorial to this special edition (Schostak, 2012): neoliberalism promotes freedom but without equality – ultimately a contradictory position because those who are in poverty have no freedom (Balibar, 1994).

As we write, this situation is being exemplified in the wave of youth riots sweeping English cities in August 2011. The mass media have promoted condemnations of those involved as 'scum' or 'feral rats' (Williams, 2011), government leaders have ridiculed arguments that poverty is a cause of the unrest, and round-the-clock court sittings have processed hundreds of youth in a peremptory fashion, dealing out harsh custodial sentences. In such ways, young people are dehumanised and cast beyond the pale of 'civilised' communities. In moments which are both iconic and bitterly ironic, members of parliament and city councillors appear before news cameras to declare that the perpetrators do not belong to 'our' city. Such statements lack any recognition that the riots might be an inchoate response by young people to their own long-standing perceptions that they indeed did not belong to the cities where they live, in which the recent priorities of the powerful have been to promote the interests of elite groups whilst slashing support services and failing to address a dire lack of training and jobs. This situation resonates with the claims of Bauman (2004) and Agamben (2005) that groups of disadvantaged people are being created in and by supposedly liberal democracies, pushed to the margins of society, and having their very citizenship itself brought into question. Like the homo sacer, these are citizens who are non-citizens, stripped of societal membership and legal protection, and yet paradoxically their existence is intensely political.

This position of exclusion and erasure, then, is how we conceptualise the 'dangerous spaces' that are the theme of this special issue. But how can we theorise this context at a deeper level?

From a welfare state to a state of exception?

Butler (2004) claims that we are currently experiencing an incipient shift away from what Foucault termed 'governmentality' – a system in which power is de-centred and exerted by shaping the behaviour, attitudes and subjectivities of the citizens in order to promote self-regulation – and a return towards sovereignty and the more overt exercise of state power. Sovereignty, she argues, has never been completely replaced by governmentality, but can be deployed by those in positions of power whenever they feel it necessary. In a similar vein, Agamben (2005) suggests that western democracies have reintroduced a permanent 'state of exception', in which the so-called democratic state engages in actions which are no longer restricted by law; which places large groups of 'suspect' people outside the law; and for which public consent is not sought.

Butler's analysis tends to associate this development with the current 'war on terror', including extreme phenomena such as the Guantanamo Bay detention centre, and 'renditions' of terror suspects for torture in third countries. This raises questions about the extent to which these developments may be relevant to wider society; and whether they are simply exceptional, rather than indicating a state of exception. It could, for example, be argued that more pervasive and effectively operated cultures of governmentality utilising approaches drawn from nudge theory (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008) – which the Coalition government has explicitly adopted – and more purposive use of power differentials have extended the governable terrain to exercise greater surveillance over services, projects and individuals. This would suggest an extension of, rather than a rupture with, strategies of governmentality.

However, we argue here that something deeper may be happening, through a shift that requires close attention: the practice of sovereignty through the state of exception may be advancing. Even though this may be occurring in less dramatic ways than those highlighted by Butler, the significance of our study points to the need for a radical re-thinking of the underlying trend. In the example of the homo sacer, such a citizen is excluded from all political life, yet remains in a highly politicised situation: 'he [sic] is in a continuous relationship with the power that banished him precisely insofar as he is at every instant exposed to an unconditioned threat …' (Agamben, 1998, p. 183). We suggest that this definition could pertain not only to Guantanamo detainees or similar cases, but also to wider populations in the dangerous space of social exclusion we described earlier. Arendt (1963) and Dejours (2009) both argue that extreme abuses of power are not established on a widespread scale overnight: they become possible through a lengthy process in which evil becomes commonplace – is 'banalised' – in everyday life. As Agamben himself notes:

> The contiguity between mass democracy and totalitarian states … does not have the form of a sudden transformation …; before impetuously coming to light in our century, the river of biopolitics that gave homo sacer his life runs its course in a hidden but continuous fashion (1998, p. 121).

Our discussion, then, can be situated alongside other work concerned with the roles of young people as actors in relation to external social changes (e.g. Giroux, 2009; Schildrick, Blackman, & MacDonald, 2009), with an innovative focus on forms of sovereignty that are both more incipient and more commonplace than the tragic plight of Guantanamo detainees.

Although there are now bodies of important literature analysing current policy trends and their impact on young people, there are very few studies indeed of the impact of these policies on the day-to-day practices of professional youth support workers, and of how those workers respond. This paper makes a significant contribution to filling this gap in knowledge through its study of one such group of workers, and through indicating the potential for further research of this kind. What are the banal practices by which very large numbers of young people become marginalised, disposable, 'waste'? What educational conduits can lead them into the dangerous space of the homo sacer? How might young people be filtered into that dangerous space through the everyday workings of educational institutions and the everyday work of practitioners within them? Here, we discuss these questions in relation to a study of the school-to-work transitions service in England, an institution that was supposed to provide support for the most disadvantaged youth and ensure their social inclusion.

We begin with an outline of the service's formation in the early years of the New Labour government, followed by a brief description of the research methodology used, then go on to present some of the findings about the institution and its everyday practices, and discuss the implications.

A new school-to-work support service

When the New Labour government was elected in Britain in 1997, one of its hallmarks was its promotion of the social inclusion discourses already noted above. The Prime Minister, Tony Blair, appointed a special Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) within his Cabinet Office, and one of the most influential documents it published soon after was Bridging the Gap (1999), containing proposals to reduce the large number of 16-18 year olds categorised as not in education, employment or training ('NEET'). At the same time, Bridging the Gap constructed such youth through a discourse of deviance and deficit, portraying some as hopelessly vulnerable and in need of protection, whilst others are characterised as disorderly: 'lazy and feckless youth staying in bed until the afternoon, then loafing about and engaging in petty crime' (Colley & Hodkinson, 2001, p. 339). Along with other New Labour policies around child protection and welfare, this approach also rested on criticisms of professional failures exacerbated by the isolation of various occupational 'silos', leading to a policy emphasis on more integrated working practices to promote young people's welfare, and (in rhetoric at least) support for 'whistleblowers' who challenged malpractice (Artaraz, 2008; Frost & Stein, 2009; Roche & Tucker, 2007).

This shift cohered with a range of New Labour policies towards children, youth and disadvantaged communities, yet all had a central contradiction at their heart. Despite a rhetoric of inclusiveness, empowerment, and 'responsibilising' youth, the top-down imposition of outcome measurements, targets and constantly-changing criteria for funding led initiatives to strengthen elements of disciplinary control and surveillance over young people, particularly with regard to the 'NEET' group (Milbourne, 2009; Roche et al., 2006). Such tendencies towards increased regulation of young people by professional agencies had already been increasing over the previous 30 years (Jeffs & Smith, 2002). However, New Labour's so-called inclusion policies began to mark a further trend towards excluding the most marginalised, the complexity of whose needs were not amenable to the meeting of simplistic targets, and the voices of whom remained unheard (Milbourne, 2002, 2009).

Following the publication of Bridging the Gap, the government decided to abolish the statutory careers service for 14-19 year olds in England, and in 2001 its staff, along with other professionals seconded from youth and social services, were transferred into a new 'holistic' youth support service named Connexions. (The other devolved countries of the UK rejected this policy and decided to maintain multi-agency working between specialist services for young people.) All staff in Connexions, whatever their specialist background, were designated 'Personal Advisers' (PAs), and were expected to carry out a much broader remit than in their previous work although with limited additional training. The PAs' role would be to:

> … take responsibility for ensuring all the needs of a young person are met in an integrated and coherent manner. Personal Advisers' work will range from: ensuring school attendance pre-16; to the provision of information regarding future learning and work opportunities; to more in-depth support in gaining access to education and training and the brokering of access to, plus coordination of, specialist services. (DfEE, 2000, p. 35)

A key aspect of their role would be to develop long-term trusting relationships with young people, in order to facilitate their (re-)engagement with education, training and employment and help them overcome obstacles such as drug use, lack of housing, criminal activity or sexual health issues and teenage pregnancy. The media portrayed this as the creation of an army of mentors expected to 'boost educational standards, ease social problems and even reduce crime' (Prescott & Black, 2000). As Artaraz (2008) notes, this represented a particularly radical form of integrated working, since it not only required partnership with other agencies, but actually conceived of integration in the very person of the practitioner herself as a 'generic' professional.

However, Connexions' funding was tied primarily to reducing numbers of young people classified as 'NEET', which became the service's over-riding target. Accordingly, another central aspect of the PA's role was to implement the triage of the 14-19 cohort into three categories, to receive differing levels of service and surveillance:

- a large proportion deemed to need minimum levels of intervention and only information and advice about career choices – it was thought that parents and teachers could provide this for the most part;
- an intermediate group at risk of disengaging, in need of in-depth guidance and other interventions;
- a small minority with multiple problems requiring intensive and sustained support, along with close tracking and monitoring of their progress and outcomes. (DfEE, 2000, 38)

Despite government promises of up to 20,000 PAs to staff Connexions, the service employed less than half this number, and was severely under-funded (Colley, Lewin, & Chadderton, 2010; Lewin & Colley, 2011). It had no resources to meet young people's needs relating to problems such as homelessness, substance abuse or sexual and mental health; and provision by other services was insufficient to meet demand. Moreover, given that Connexions' targets were to get young people off the 'NEET' register, PAs also had to contend with the fact that there were insufficient education and training places and very few job opportunities for those with the greatest needs. In April 2008, national funding for Connexions was withdrawn, and the service was fragmented and devolved to local authorities. This took place just as financial crisis was hitting the UK, youth opportunities were diminishing further still, and public

spending was being cut back hard. Connexions – viewed as a marginal service now failing to meet its targets – was one of the first areas to experience severe cuts. This was the backdrop to our study of changes to the roles, identities and practices of careers advisers in Connexions, and we go on to describe briefly the methodology used.

Researching roles, identities and practices in school-to-work transition support

Our study, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, began in 2008, several years on from the establishment of the Connexions service, but at a time when the service was under considerable threat and in some chaos due to its devolvement from a nationally-funded service to local authorities with uncertain funding. Our primary data were generated through 'career history' interviews with 17 PAs working in three Connexions services in the North of England, and with nine former PAs from a further eight local services who had quit Connexions because of strong disagreements with its strategy. This gave us data pertaining to 11 of the 43 Connexions services which had existed until April 2008. All those interviewed were volunteer participants in the research, but the sample was chosen to ensure a range service duration and initial training routes, and a similar gender-balance as across the whole service (approximately 80 percent female). We also interviewed two senior managers from each of the three Connexions services participating in the research, and a number of local and national stakeholders. All data was anonymised in order to protect confidentiality; some data was withdrawn by respondents who feared negative repercussions if they were identified.

   The data were transformed both through an initial process of coding to analyse emergent themes (Henn, Weinstein, & Foard, 2009), and also, in the case of the career history interviews, a process of narrative data synthesis (Colley, 2010) to elaborate the trajectories of the PAs' and ex-PAs' professional roles, identities and practices over their time in Connexions. Here we draw on those career history narratives from PAs and ex-PAs, and the accounts they give of the ways in which government policy on Connexions, mediated by the managers of their services, impacted on their practices and acted as a conduit for their young clients – not into a safe space of social inclusion, but towards the more dangerous space of disposability and erasure discussed in the introduction to this article. Two practices in particular stood out in these narratives: a dual process of triage that first identified those with 'intensive needs', but then prioritised the 'easiest-to-help' of this 'hard-to-help' group; and processes of surveillance and control which emphasised monitoring young people rather than supporting them, and placing them in any available destination that would remove them from the 'NEET' category, however inappropriate it might be. We discuss each of these practices in turn.

Triage upon triage: excluding young people from support

Connexions' main target was to reduce the number of young people classified as 'NEET', and its funding was geared to this priority. This impacted on its liaison work with schools. Previously, the former careers service had engaged in in-depth consultation and curriculum development in partnership with schools. But for Connexions PAs, this was reduced to an annual process of triage to identify pupils'

level of 'need'. Many PAs were opposed to this process, and felt it was counterproductive. A considerable number of clients who would be classified with 'minimum support needs' were likely to find themselves at considerable disadvantage in the education and labour markets, but with very limited access to support from Connexions, and were consequently at risk of entering the 'NEET' category. It would also undermine policy efforts to widen participation from lower socio-economic groups in higher education:

> I work in a school that's in quite a deprived area … Some of those young people, they may be the first person in their family who has ever looked at going to university but, on the grid, they're 'minimum support', but nobody can help them look at university … because they haven't got drug issues, they haven't got attendance problems, they've not been involved with the youth offending team … So it's down to them self-referring, really, or, maybe, getting an interview later on in the year, when all the others have been seen. (Bettany, PA, Moorside)

The needs of these young people for high-quality guidance to navigate a complex and competitive landscape of post-16 provision were thus constructed as 'non-needs' and erased.

However, in addition to this first process of triage, a second, unofficial and highly contested process of triage was also taking place. In a context of high caseloads, severe time limitations, and inadequate resources and provision, PAs experienced pressures to avoid young people with the most intensive needs, who had little chance of finding or sustaining a placement; but instead, to concentrate on the easiest-to-help of this 'intensive support' group in order to meet targets. So a further level of triage, decided by individual PAs under pressure from their managers, took place to exclude the 'hardest-to help':

> We've got targets, what seem like absolutely crazy targets [for reducing 'NEET'] for next year and so we're quite focused on that, to be honest. That's the message that we get from above: 'You focus on the targets', not to the detriment of the people – it's hard to explain. This is quite confidential, really, isn't it? [Laughs nervously] Obviously, you have got to bear the person in mind but, if that person needs huge amounts of help and there aren't huge amounts of help out there to draw on, then we can't be doing it all, because everybody else suffers […] If you can help the majority a bit, it's better than helping one person a lot when they might not even move into something positive … (Beth, PA, Hillview)

Others explained that PAs working mainly with youth classified as 'NEET' had caseloads three or four times larger than the figure of 20 that had originally been mooted. This meant that it was impossible to build up relationships with young people, or even see them more than once every few months, and PAs had to make decisions about which young people they could afford to devote time to if they were to meet their targets.

This represents one of the most striking paradoxes we found in Connexions: on the one hand, it was supposed to prioritise help for the most disadvantaged young people through trusting relationships with PAs; on the other hand, its imposed targets, mediated through institutional management, meant that those relationships were influenced by covert judgments about the young person's capacity to enter employment or training. As a result, the neediest were sometimes denied support. This paradox formed a site of frequent conflict between PAs and their managers, and contributed to PAs' disillusionment and the departure of some from the service.

This double triage can be seen as an element of the 'order-building' (Bauman, 2004) by which some youth are excluded from educational and welfare provision. We deliberately use the word 'triage' here, because its etymology suggests important ambiguities. In its most common English usage, triage describes a process – typically in hospital emergency rooms – whereby those with the most urgent needs are prioritised for treatment. In one sense, this corresponds to the official first-level triage conducted by PAs, whereby they categorised their cohort according to three degrees of need. But what if non-priority hospital patients then received no treatment at all, like the 'minimum needs' young people who might still struggle to make successful school-to-work transitions, but who had little access to support from Connexions? Alternatively, 'triage' derives originally from the French, and its second definition in that language is highly redolent of the unofficial second-stage triage that emerged in Connexions: 'to handle in such a way as to remove any bad element', illustrated by the example of picking stones from lentils (Rey, 1992). What if, having undertaken the first-stage triage in the emergency room, those 'priority' patients with the lowest chance of recovery, or whose treatment would take the longest, were then excluded from treatment? Such a situation can again be compared with that of young people whose 'intensive needs' were so great that they were unlikely to enter education, employment or training in the short or medium term, and who might then be discarded from active support. Both levels of triage effectively placed different groups of young people outside of entitlement to provision, whilst a policy rhetoric of focusing on the most needy was maintained. Like Agamben's homo sacer (1998), these youth were excluded from social and educational institutions and entitlements, but had to reckon constantly with the threat of further marginalisation. We turn now to a second set of practices that compounded this paradox.

Surveillance and control

Our data showed that PAs were constantly frustrated by the lack of resources, in Connexions or other services, to support young people's needs. In fact, the main tools at PAs' disposal were for tracking and monitoring their clients. This resonates strongly with Giroux's notion of marginalised youth as 'flawed consumers', increasingly subject to policing and surveillance as their opportunities for participation in (consumer) society become ever more narrow. PAs, particularly those who did outreach work, found themselves simply tracking young people who were in the NEET group, recording their status or completing the 'Common Assessment Framework' (CAF), a lengthy and detailed form for sharing information across services. Their accounts show that these tasks were largely perceived as obstacles rather than as contributing to any supportive relationship with the young people.

> I talked to my manager about [the situation with a young man who was homeless]. He said, 'Oh, you must do a CAF. They need a CAF.' So I did a CAF and nothing came of that, and you just think, 'OK, what am I doing with this?' As far as I can see, that went nowhere. (Beth, PA, Hillview)

> There was a pro-forma that you had to fill in, that you needed information on the GP [medical doctor], you needed information on the parents' occupation, and that kind of stuff. I thought that was really intrusive actually. (Helen, ex-PA)

Some felt this meant that Connexions was being expected to police young people rather than provide real support, illustrating the shift from care to control (Harvey, 2003) and from compassion to repression (Giroux, 2009).

> If you're a young person living in an area where there really isn't much opportunity, there's very little employment, there isn't any college provision, not many of your friends are working, quite a few of them have got babies, money's not an issue – what am I offering them that they need, that they haven't already got? Some people would say we are agents of social control. (Maxine, PA, Parkside)

> I found it a little paradoxical that we had to go and do home visits and sort of play a heavy-handed role, and yet if the young person came into the office, we had nothing, nothing more to offer, really. That was a difficult situation to be in, because it was like a policing, authoritarian thing to do to them, visit someone in their home, you know, and yet have nothing to offer them when they actually came into the office. So that home visit thing, that was very stressful. (Layla, ex-PA)

With the 'NEET' group, this work literally involved tracking young people down, often when they and their families were unwilling to engage with Connexions. PAs felt explicitly uncomfortable about the implications this had for their role.

> A lot of time and resources were devoted to what we called 'following up', which one of my colleagues referred to as 'social surveillance.' (Will, ex-PA)

> [Follow-up meant] ringing people, going round, knocking on doors and hassling people, and I felt like I worked for like the Gestapo […] I can't remember anyone achieving anything positive as a result of me going and knocking on their door. (Helen, ex-PA)

This last quote, especially in Helen's use of the word 'Gestapo', evokes a powerful image of a totalitarian regime, and reminds us of Butler's (2004) argument about the increasing prominence of sovereign power to control populations. The seemingly commonplace act of 'following up' can be seen as an example of the stealthy encroachment of a state of exception (Agamben, 2005), a banality concealing significant ills (Arendt, 1963; Dejours, 2009).

Other PAs talked about how they were pressurised by managers to coerce young people in turn to take placements that were vocationally unsuitable, or which were inappropriate given their social situation, just to meet targets for 'NEET' reduction.

> I'm putting pressure on that young person to sign up, and it almost reminds me of back years ago when a double glazing salesman rang, saying: 'Come on! Sign here, sign here!' I'm thinking, 'This isn't right, this'. I had to back right off and say, 'Fine, if you've got things on the go … If you want to sign up, fine. If you're not ready for it, that's cool', and yet I'll get a bit of background grief [from management] about me not achieving a sign-up. I don't think it should be like that, myself. It shouldn't be like that at all. (Vince, PA, Moortown)

Often, the drawing and crossing of these ethical lines led PAs out of Connexions, whether through choice or otherwise. Vince, like many others, continually challenged his line manager about such issues, and his short-term contract was not renewed. Barry highlighted how such pressures led to his decision to leave Connexions:

> I can't remember which training provider I sent [the client] along to, but it was whichever one was recruiting at the time, and I sent him off [...] and that was it. If I had the choice, I would not do that with him, but you know, when these e-mails go

out, you're monitored. You'll have a monthly supervision, and you were sort of given – it wasn't the thumbscrews – but you were basically grilled on why you didn't offer this person this or that [...]. So I felt with this person I had no choice, and you go home, at the end of the day, thinking: 'Why do I bother? This is not what I trained for'. (Barry, ex-PA)

On the one hand, 'follow-up' activities seem to be resisted by young people and their families; on the other, we see that at least some of the reason for this may have been young people's awareness that Connexions had little to offer them, or would seek to coerce them into 'opportunities' in which they had no vocational interest or aptitude. The outcomes could entail inadvertently encouraging young people to exclude themselves from the remit of Connexions, thus disappearing from the visible record of those with support needs; or reinforcing the 'revolving door' syndrome, where young people enter an unsuitable placement from which they might then rapidly disengage. As a postscript to the research, we must add that, under the Conservative-Democrat coalition elected in 2010, all national funding for Connexions was subsequently withdrawn from September 2010, with many local services being abolished, and others operating on a much reduced basis. Responsibility for youth with 'intensive' support needs was handed to local authorities, while schools and colleges were expected to fund the provision of support and guidance for other youth – in both cases, from existing budgets undergoing cuts.

Not only did Connexions act as conduit for young people into a dangerous space of exclusion and erasure; it also led its practitioners towards a dangerous space themselves (see Colley, in press). They experienced considerably emotional suffering as a result of the tensions between different strands of policy – inclusionary and disciplinary – and as a result of their conflicts with managers over pressure to engage in practices that tended towards control rather than empowerment of young people. For some of them, this emotional suffering excluded them from the workplace through ill-health, and eventually from their jobs as they felt forced to quit employment in Connexions. Clearly, the promised government encouragement for 'whistleblowers' (Roche & Tucker, 2007) did not seem to offer any support for those who did challenge the implementation of more disciplinary aspects of youth policy. Moreover, thousands of PAs have now lost their jobs through redundancy, and many find themselves unemployed in a labour market context of ever-shrinking public services under austerity measures .

Our study therefore challenges the perspective of other research on the roles and attitudes of Connexions staff, based on data generated in the very early years of Connexions, in which blame is particularly laid at the feet of those PAs who had formerly been careers advisers for the service's failures; the problem is largely identified as being their 'passive resistance' and their inability (or refusal) to adapt to a more generic form of professional practice (Artaraz, 2006, 2008). All of the PAs we interviewed had originally been trained in career advice and guidance. Yet we see from the data how their difficulties and resistance derived not from narrow professional self-interest, but from a real concern with the needs of young people, and a rejection of the exclusionary consequences of Connexions policy, even where such resistance had sharply exclusionary consequences for themselves.

A creeping state of exception?

In the first half of this article, we drew on macro-level conceptualisations of the disposability created by policy-makers as a dangerous space for the poor, and for young people in particular. Such views emphasise the building of an exclusionary order (Bauman, 2004) by which certain populations are rendered suspect, (re)produced as 'human waste', have their full belonging as citizens denied, and are marginalised further and further. Our focus in the second part of the article has been to examine some day-to-day practices in education by which this process is enacted. As in other 'social inclusion' policies, the actual outcomes may be the very opposite of the rhetorical ones (Milbourne, 2002).

The data from our project reveal, at the meso-level of institutional policy and the micro-level of professional practice, some of the ways in which such dangerous order-building arises in the supposedly safe space of one particular youth transition support service. A double process of triage left many unable to access the service to which they were supposed to have an entitlement, including some of the most disadvantaged. At the same time, young people's potential trust in encounters with a PA was undermined by the imposition of disciplinary surveillance and control, which in turn created further exclusionary processes. Thus we see Connexions acting as a conduit for some young people, not only into a dangerous space beyond welfare support, but also into one of surveillance which positions them as suspect and therefore justifies their further marginalisation (Giroux, 2009; Monahan & Torres, 2010). Moreover, the rhetoric of a 'holistic' service might reflect the commitments of PAs to serve their clients, but the policy-driven reality – inscribing the deficits of young people's lives in 'CAFs' and other records – is more totalitarian than holistic (Colley, 2003b). This supports Butler's (2004) notion of a shift from governmentality to sovereignty as the dominant mode of ruling. These young people are not subtly encouraged into self-surveillance or technologies of the self (Foucault, 1988); they are subject to external and explicit technologies of control, imposed by policy-makers and managers, and enacted or resisted by PAs. Their lives, like that of the homo sacer, are thus deeply politicised – as are those of the practitioners working with them.

This raises questions about the extent to which such policies and institutional practices in educational provision relate to the development of a state of exception. Clearly they remain far from current dramatic forms of the suspension of law, such as in Guantanamo Bay, or the previous totalitarian horrors of Nazism. But we would argue that they nevertheless contain elements of the state of exception, and contribute to its creeping encroachment into ever more areas of civil society. This in turn may pave the way for a broader state of exception, preparing populations for a more radical exclusion of certain social groups at moments when both discourse and practices serve to construct those groups as 'waste' to be disposed of. The policies of neoliberalism, which promote freedom but without equality (Balibar, 1994), mean marginalised young people are displaced at best into the various waiting room strategies of governments (such as Connexions and various training or 'pre-vocational' preparation schemes) and at worst the 'dangerous spaces' of those who have no hope. These are crucial issues as the global financial crisis worsens and austerity continues to bite deeper.

We conclude that far more attention in research, policy and practice needs to be paid in education and related services to the ethical, social and political consequences of this shift towards sovereignty, through further close investigation of local, micro-level practices and the meso- and macro-level influences which drive them. Such evidence has to become the basis not just for interpreting the conditions in which we live, as Agamben does, but for acting to change them (Colatrella, 2011).

Note

1. The category of 'economic inactivity' applies to far more people than 'unemployment', since unemployment is defined narrowly in terms of claimant eligibility rather than joblessness:

    'Economically inactive people are not in work and do not meet the internationally agreed definition of unemployment. They are people without a job who have not actively sought work in the last four weeks and/or are not available to start work in the next two weeks.' (UK National Statistics Publication Hub, n.d.).

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