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# The 'Broken Society' Election: Class Hatred and the Politics of Poverty and Place in Glasgow East

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*This paper considers some of the ways in which representations of people experiencing poverty and disadvantaged places continue to be informed by ideas of individual inadequacy, dependency and disorder. Drawing on media reportage of poverty during the Glasgow East by-election in July 2008, it argues not only that people defined as 'poor' and locales that are severely disadvantaged continue to be 'othered' through such narratives, but also that this provides a clear indication of the ways in which the politics of poverty and state welfare are increasingly being fought-out in the media. It is argued that such misrecognition amounts to social injustice and stands in the way of progressive approaches to poverty and social welfare.*

### Introduction

The 'politics of redistribution and of recognition and respect' (Lister, 2004: 187) have been identified as central to the experience of poverty, with power and significance beyond, but underpinned by, the material circumstances in which they are situated. The language of misrecognition is at the heart of political struggles for voice as a primary form of symbolic domination (Bourdieu, 1994; Lister, 2008). The portrayal of poor people and places in public discourses can be seen as an act of oppression, through which social inequalities – such as class – are compounded and reproduced (Bourdieu, 1992; Schubert, 2008: 183). The damaging affects of misrepresentation at a rhetorical level compound experiences of material disadvantage to produce a 'lived experience of domination and repression' (Frost and Hoggett, 2008: 439). As Fairclough (2000: 3) argues, developments in the 'mediatisation' of contemporary politics have opened space for journalists to have greater influence in framing debates around social problems, such as poverty. This article presents an analysis of newspaper coverage of the 2008 Glasgow East UK parliamentary by-election as a case study in the rhetorical misrepresentation of people and place.

Parliamentary by-elections have the capacity to draw national attention to localities that do not usually figure prominently in media reportage. When that by-election is seen to hold the future of the incumbent Prime Minister, even more attention is focused on it. The by-election for the Glasgow East Westminster constituency on 24 July 2008 was portrayed not only as a crucial judgement of Gordon Brown's leadership, but also the first real electoral test for the Scottish National Party (SNP) minority government in Edinburgh.[1] While the contrasting fortunes of New Labour and Gordon Brown and the SNP and Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond captured much of the glare of media and political commentary, the particularities of 'Glasgow East' and its population were also the subject of considerable attention. Overwhelmingly, the portrayal of this area and the

people who live in it during the election campaign was highly negative, drawing upon stereotypical representations of poverty in disadvantaged urban localities.

The Glasgow East by-election offers insights into the ways in which the politics of poverty were playing-out in 2008 and potentially also points to some of the directions which this might develop in the immediate future. Taking place within days of the UK Government's announcement of another phase of welfare 'reform', in which proposals to abolish Incapacity Benefit and Income Support and to make the long-term unemployed work in exchange for benefit were the most notable measures (DWP, 2008; Gall, 2008), Glasgow East was held-up by a number of politicians and sections of the media as wholly representative of the kind of 'welfare dependent' localities which welfare reform needed to address. In this respect alone, the politics of poverty and place in Glasgow East have a wider UK significance and resonance (Grant, 2008; Johnson and Brown, 2008).[2] However, Glasgow East also shows the prevalence of anti-working class attitudes within important sections of UK society, not least in sections of the media and in mainstream politics, and in this context it represents also an example of the growing concerns among some politicians and commentators with the 'ghetto poor' in particular and 'white working class' more generally (Dench and Gavron, 2006; Runnymede Trust, 2009; Haylett, 2001).

In this paper I aim to discuss how media reportage of the by-election and ongoing political debates around welfare reform and poverty reinforced each other in ways that worked to stereotype and stigmatise the population of Glasgow East, in the process garnering support for a more punitive welfare regime and marginalising alternative perspectives which offer more structural explanations, centred on issues of class and inequality. However, it is also argued that the dominant representation 'othered' (see Lister, 2004) the impoverished working class in Glasgow East, underpinned by a strong class racism.

### The study

This study presents a discourse analysis of the coverage of the Glasgow-East by-election in selected newspapers and political magazines during the three-week period of the by-election. All articles and stories relating to Glasgow East were included from the selected publications during the three-week campaign period, 1 July 2008–24 July 2008. The newspapers were selected for inclusion in the study to reflect the spectrum of political and ideological perspectives at UK (*The Independent*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *The Times*, and *Daily Mail*) and Scotland levels (*The Herald* and *The Scotsman*). The two most prominent political commentary magazines, *The Spectator* and *New Statesman*, were also selected for inclusion. Collectively these publications constitute a body of political debate in the UK.

The method of analysis was influenced by Fairclough's (2001: 229) critical discourse analysis in the sense that it sought to identify 'non-obvious ways in which language is involved in social relations of power and domination'. The focus of the analysis was to identify representations of the people and place of 'Glasgow East'. Once representations were identified, these were categorised in relation to characterisations of poverty and of 'welfare' and 'welfare dependency', portrayals of people experiencing poverty and depictions of Glasgow East, and were analysed critically in relation to ongoing political controversies.

### Where 'time has stood still'? Reporting Glasgow East

> When one thinks of Glasgow East – and the lucky ones are those who have to go no further than just think … If you seek Labour's monument, look at this hellhole of a constituency. (Heffer, 2008)

In 2006, a research programme investigating public attitudes to poverty and inequality was launched by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The role of the media, and in particular the news media, occupied a key element of the research agenda. The role of the media in helping to shape public attitudes to poverty and welfare, an issue which has concerned researchers for some time now (Golding and Middleton, 1982), was an important part of this research (McKendrick *et al.*, 2008). One of the key findings was that UK poverty was generally a marginal issue for the news media, but, when poverty was reported, people experiencing poverty were either represented in a stigmatised way or as passive victims (McKendrick *et al.*, 2008: 31–2). The media play an important role in helping to form and shape public attitudes to poverty, attitudes which appear to be hardening and which often view poverty as a consequence of individual behavioural inadequacies and which tend to show less support for redistribution and more demand for tough measures against 'benefit cheats' (Hills *et al.*, 2009; Park *et al.*, 2007).

The Glasgow East by-election represents a unique and important case whereby the influential sections of the print media played an important role in helping to generate consent for more punitive government policies in relation to welfare – as well as working to harden attitudes to poverty and welfare. During the by-election campaign, Glasgow East, and the citizens who live therein, were generally portrayed in a negative light. While this is certainly not the case with all media reportage, even in those articles which purport to offer a 'balanced' commentary, the 'problems' of Glasgow East were frequently used to support arguments which presented poverty and other social ills alternatively as either a consequence of welfare dependency or individual inadequacies in some form or other. While much newspaper coverage signalled UK-wide ongoing political controversies around welfare reform and poverty, those arguments which located poverty in the context of the long-term economic decline and deindustrialisation of this part of Glasgow, that is the more structural accounts, were largely marginalised. This is reflected in the language deployed by many journalists in describing Glasgow East.

Glasgow East is, to quote Melanie Reid (2008a) in *The Times*, 'part of the world that defies exaggeration'; a place where for the *Telegraph's* Simon Johnson, 'a sense of despair pervades thousands of residents, half of whom live in social housing' (Johnson, 2008), and where some of the housing estates, especially 'grim' council estates such as Easterhouse (MacIntyre, 2008), represent not only a 'horrendous social experiment' but also a 'no-go-zone' (Nelson, 2008a). Elsewhere Neil Tweedie tells us in no uncertain terms in the *Telegraph* (Tweedie, 2008) that:

> In some parts, time has stood still. Stroll down the Shettleston Road, one of its seedy arteries, and you will find yourself in another era – pre-Blair, pre-Thatcher, virtually pre-war.

The newspapers and magazines represented here are on the right of the political spectrum, each contributing to the representation of the area and its population in

generally hostile tones. Real and long-standing social problems tended to be presented in sensationalised ways. For example, Glasgow's unenviable location at the top of UK morbidity and mortality league tables is a recurring theme in many of the stories featured across the print media. Asks A.A. Gill in *The Sunday Times*:

> Who would you expect to live longer: an east Glaswegian or a man from Colombia, Albania or North Korea? The answer is that the Colombians, Albanians and North Koreans would drink a toast at the Glaswegian's wake. (Gill, 2008)

The choice of Albania and North Korea is particularly poignant given the tendency also in some of the press reportage to construct Glasgow East with its high proportion of socially rented housing as a Stalinist housing monolith and state-dependent locale. Such comparisons are meant to shock – but they did not stop with these three countries. Writing in *The Times*, Ben MacIntyre adds Gambia and Bangladesh. The Gaza Strip is used as a comparator by Melanie Reid again in *The Times*, while *The Spectator* draws a contrast between life expectancy in Glasgow East, Uzbekistan, the Sudan, Cambodia and Ghana (Nelson, 2008a)! Brian Brady in *The Independent* refers to Gaza (Brady, 2008) and his counterpart Andy McSmith (2008) writing in *The Independent on Sunday* also offers the by now well-used Gaza comparison and also draws a parallel with North Korea.

However, life expectancy represented only one dimension in the general portrayal of Glasgow East featuring across a number of the press stories. *The Times*' journalist Melanie Reid, while perhaps using the most headline-grabbing language, referring to 'Glasgow's Guantanamo', is hardly out of tune with many of her colleagues in making the following comment:

> Glasgow East is a part of the world that defies exaggeration. Desultory buses head out from the city centre towards some of the worst areas of concentrated poverty in the Western world: Shettleston, Barlanark, Garthamlock, Easterhouse, Parkhead . . . communities that figure with monotonous regularity both on the charge sheet at Glasgow Sheriff Court and at the top of the lists of the most socially deprived wards in Britain. They might as well be called Guantanamo. For many thousands of welfare prisoners on sink estates, marooned by bad housing, violence, addiction, unemployment, ill health and shattered relationships, there is little chance of escape. (Reid, 2008a)

Elsewhere in an article in the *Daily Telegraph* similar sentiments are voiced:

> A sense of despair pervades thousands of residents, half of whom live in social housing . . . The Sandwick Square shopping centre in Easterhouse epitomises a lot of what has gone wrong with Labour's great post-war social experiment – the area's sprawling mass of council estates. A sad collection of shops – Pound Saver, a pawnbroker, a bookmaker, Farm Foods. (Johnson, 2008)

While in *The Independent*, McSmith sees Glasgow East as:

> A deprived and neglected part of Glasgow, where a man who lives to be 55 can consider himself lucky . . . Glasgow East is a tough area, where 30 per cent of the working age population is on unemployment or incapacity benefit, nearly 40 per cent of children grow up in homes where

there is no adult in paid employment, and three fifths of the people have no access to a car. The social services have 12,000 local children and adults on their book. (McSmith, 2008)

Two themes emerge here that are worthy of note: the representation not only of Glasgow East as a signifier of social problems, but of council housing per se. This was a recurring feature of the media news reports, and supports arguments that council housing has increasingly become a 'problem' tenure in New Labour Britain (see Johnstone and Mooney, 2007; Watt, 2008). This issue is returned to later in the paper. The second theme to emerge here is that some 'external' causal factors may be at work, signalled by the reference in the McSmith quote that the east end represents a 'deprived and neglected' part of Glasgow. However, claims that Glasgow East was neglected tended to be advanced not as a way of highlighting structural factors such as rising inequality and economic restructuring, but as part of a general anti-New Labour message, that government policies were not working, or were insufficiently targeted at dealing with the 'real' problems as signified by Glasgow East and similar locales elsewhere across the UK.

The extent and intensity of the social and economic problems that face the population of the east end of Glasgow should not be underestimated. For much of the past century, this has been a locale in decline, reflecting the industrial decline of the Clydeside region more generally. How these are presented and interpreted, however, the language deployed and the values that are conveyed through these accounts are also crucially important – symbolically important – in structuring the political debate, indeed they shape the politics of poverty. We return to this in the conclusion.

The type of press reporting of Glasgow East that has been presented here thus far, while influenced by the arguments advanced by some politicians, in turn also helps to shape the attitudes of politicians and informs policy-making. In the reporting of Glasgow East, significant sections of the newspaper media, fuelled in part as we will see by leading Conservative politicians, indulged in an anti-poor and anti-welfare rhetoric that would not be out of place among the conservative right in the United States (Macek, 2006) and which many in the UK thought had been abandoned in the mid 1990s with the defeat of the last Conservative government.

Successive decades of rigorous research on poverty have provided in-depth understandings of matters of definition, measurement and the lived experiences of people struggling to cope with poverty. These have been sidelined by significant sections of the media in preference for invoking the more hostile and punitive language of 'the underclass', despite this approach being largely discredited as methodologically flawed and ideologically/morally driven.

In sharp contrast, poverty is generally understood, by academics and researchers as part of a wider process of social exclusion (Alcock, 2008). However, in what might be termed the developing politics of poverty in Britain in the early 2000s, there is evidence of the increasing prevalence and persistency of ideas of individual deficiency and moral decline shaping public attitudes to poverty and welfare (Hills *et al.*, 2009; Park *et al.*, 2007; Young, 2007). And while the kinds of thinking associated with some of the harsher underclass ideologies may not be fully supported, some notions of social exclusion share similar ways of thinking to those of underclass ideologies.

John Veit-Wilson (1998) makes an important distinction between 'weak' and 'strong' versions of social exclusion. The former focuses on the individual's behavioural inadequacies, such as their lack of motivation, which inhibit their integration into

mainstream society. Here, social exclusion is understood as 'self-exclusion'. This weak version is closer to the underclass arguments of Charles Murray (1980), which regards 'welfare dependency' as the key problem to be addressed.

The strong version by contrast emphasises either the marginalisation and or social isolation of those who are excluded through lack of opportunities, for example to work, or which highlights wider barriers, including prevailing inequalities within society.

As has been well argued elsewhere (Levitas, 2005; Young, 2007), it has tended to be the weaker version of social exclusion which has found currency under New Labour, focusing on individual limitations or failure to engage with opportunities provided through government policies. As Levitas (2005) notes, however, while different discourses of social exclusion will be in circulation at a given time, the dominant discourse (what she terms the 'socially integrationist discourse') is one that seeks to challenge refusal to work, 'worklessness' and welfare dependency. Such discourses were only too apparent during the Glasgow East by-election campaign.

### Constructing 'problem places'

The representation of Glasgow East provided an opportunity for voice to be given once again to other kinds of thinking that have long featured prominently in the reporting of poverty in disadvantaged urban areas across the UK, which works to construct particular locales as 'problem' places, or as 'welfare ghettoes' (Nelson, 2009b). Here the idea of unproductive and disorderly urban domains feature strongly in the dominant imagining. As an editorial in *The Sunday Times* noted, 'Glasgow may be the most extreme example but there are mini-Glasgow's in every British city and, increasingly, in smaller towns' (*The Sunday Times*, 15 July 2008). In addition to high mortality rates, many other negatives were highlighted. The high levels of unemployment, especially of long-term unemployment, were frequently interpreted as a problem of *worklessness* – with all the connotations of individual inadequacy that such a term conveys, and with relatively little acknowledgement that the east end of Glasgow had historically been one of the key industrial workhouses of the British Empire, giving way to long-term economic decline in the second half of the twentieth century.

Poor housing was also an important feature in media and political commentary, with many commentators highlighting that almost 50 per cent of the population lived in social housing. Social housing is portrayed as something that it is intrinsically problematic, that signals, once more, a 'dependency culture' (Watt, 2008).

Council estates, as we have already seen, are presented as 'sink' estates, or are otherwise 'notorious' or problematic in some way or other. The large 1950s Easterhouse estate on the eastern boundary of Glasgow received particular moralised attention, here in the *Guardian*:

> There is a lot of grass in the Glasgow overspill estates of Easterhouse, most of if the kind you don't smoke; lots of trees and green fields too. By general consent they mask serious poverty, drugs and ill-health, unemployment and too many bottle-fed babies. (White, 2008)

Fifty per cent of the population have no formal qualifications, we are informed. John Rentoul, writing in *The Independent*, speaks of the 'desolation' of Easterhouse, and of

'broken families', and that this is a 'broken society' (Rentoul, 2008). Many reporters comment that Glasgow East is either at the top or close to the top of many UK-wide deprivation indicators, with a high proportion of the population in receipt of out-of-work and especially incapacity benefit. The constituency is also home, we are repeatedly told, to a 'violent gang culture', a place where 'the law of the jungle' rules, where the 'gossip is all about "drug dealers" or "organised crime"' (Gill, 2008), and where drug addiction and knife crime are everyday aspects of life.

However, over and above this reporting, Glasgow East is presented overwhelmingly as a place of 'misery', of 'apathy' and 'despair' (read 'demoralisation' or moral inadequacy), a place containing 'wasted highlands' (Reid, 2008b). There are, we are told, ghettos, not just any kind of ghettos, but 'welfare ghettos'. Glasgow East is, above all, presented as a 'problem place' (Mooney, 2008).

Disadvantaged areas such as the east end of Glasgow are frequently constructed as homogenous places characterised by a uniform degree of deprivation, despair and disorganisation. There is, with few exceptions (see Orr, 2008), little recognition in the general reporting of 'Glasgow East', a label which itself invokes a sense of uniformity, of the diversity that exists in Glasgow's east end, of the myriad of complex local geographies, multiple and varied histories and contrasting life chances. But viewed as a local of material, moral and physical isolation – a place that signals and warns of the dangers of failure, or to use the term deployed by Jock Young, where the 'meta-humiliation' of poverty is marked (Young, 2007: 76–77), Glasgow East becomes 'othered'!

### The 'broken society' election

It has already been noted that media and political commentary work to influence and reinforce each other (see McKendrick *et al.*, 2008). This was the case in Glasgow East and arguably it was visits to the constituency by two leading Conservative politicians which has helped to shape much of the newspaper media reportage during the election. Iain Duncan Smith, MP for Chingford and Woodford Green in the North London suburbs, had already made well-publicised trips to the Glasgow's east end, launching in February 2008 a Centre for Social Justice report detailing the problems of the area, *Breakthrough Glasgow*. Using terms that came to be the staples of many of the newspaper reports of the election, Glasgow East was the epitome of the 'broken society'. Picking-up on this, the Glasgow East by-election in turn was dubbed the 'broken society' or 'breakdown society' election (see for example Elliot, 2008; Pickard and Barker, 2008). Following Smith to Glasgow to launch the Conservative election campaign, Conservative leader David Cameron also invoked Smith's broken society arguments, and, while wishing to avoid any suggestion that they were solely responsible for the media reportage of poverty evidenced here, nonetheless they were instrumental in portraying the people of Glasgow East in very disparaging terms, albeit as a way of highlighting New Labour's failures. In particular 'Shettleston Man', Shettleston being one of the more deprived areas in the east end of Glasgow, is identified as a particular problem subject:

> This individual has low life expectancy. He lives in social housing, drug and alcohol abuse play an important part in his life and he is always out of work. His white blood cell count killing him directly as a result of his lifestyle and its lack of purpose. (Smith, 2008b)

Elsewhere Smith (2008a) makes reference to 'Shettleston Man's' 'couch potato' lifestyle. The stark message is that ill-health, unemployment and poverty are primarily matters of individual failure, but also of personal responsibility. Cameron, in a speech which was widely reported (and also attacked from some quarters including by Liberal Democrat Leader Nick Clegg (see Mulholland, 2008) spoke of the 'dangers' of 'de-moralisation' in areas such as Glasgow East:

> The thread that links it all together passes, yes, through family breakdown, welfare dependency, debt, drugs, poverty, poor policing, housing, and failing schools but it is a thread that goes deeper, as we see a society that is in danger of losing its sense of personal responsibility, social responsibility, common decency and, yes, even, public morality.

> We as a society have been far too sensitive. In order to avoid injury to people's feelings, in order to avoid being judgemental, we have failed to say what needs to be said. We have seen a decades-long erosion of responsibility, of social virtue, of self-discipline, respect for others, deferring gratification instead of instant gratification . . .

> Instead we prefer moral neutrality, a refusal to make judgements about what is good and bad behaviour. Bad. Good. Right. Wrong. These are words that our political system and our public sector scarcely dare to use any more. (Cameron, 2008)

It is clear that welfare provision is identified as *the* factor generating the kinds of social problems that have been highlighted above. Again here we can observe the interplay of journalistic commentary and Conservative political thinking. Fraser Nelson of *The Spectator* comments that Glasgow East is:

> a hideous social experiment, showing what happens when the horizontal ties which bind those within communities to one another are replaced with vertical ties, binding individuals to the welfare state. (Nelson 2008a)

He continues arguing that:

> State handouts may have been the cure to post-war poverty, but it's the cause of 21st century poverty as we have seen in Glasgow East. (Nelson, 2008b, see also Nelson 2009a, b and c)

Such claims are echoed elsewhere, here Simon Heffer in the *Telegraph*:

> In Glasgow, the weapon of mass destruction has been welfarism. (Heffer, 2008b)

These arguments are entirely in tune with those of Smith and Cameron. Once more we have Smith (Smith, 2008a) commenting that:

> Somewhere between 50 and 60 per cent of the working-age population are economically inactive . . . All of this, of course, leads to high levels of crime. Although the London media seldom report this, Glasgow has, in proportion to its size, many more gangs than London.

Further:

> For too long, people have been allowed to languish, trapped in a dependency culture that held low expectations of those living there and made no demands of them either. You only need to

look at the social housing system that successive governments have pursued to realise why, on so many of these estates, lone parenting, worklessness, failed education and addiction are an acceptable way of life. Over the years we have put all the most broken families, with myriad problems, on the same estates. Too few of the children ever see a good role model: for the dysfunctional family life is the norm.

Worse still, visiting vast estates like Easterhouse ... you realise that incentives to remain dependent far outweigh anything else ...

To rectify this we need to accept that the welfare system has become part of this breakdown, giving perverse incentives to too many people. It needs to be changed. It needs to have a simple purpose: to move people from dependence to independence ...

At the heart of this likes work, The system must help people to not only find work but also to remain in work, to get the 'work habit'.

This is the brand of 'modern, compassionate, Conservatism' that Iain Duncan Smith espouses, following his Damascus-like conversion on an earlier visit to the east end of Glasgow in 2002. It was this visit that led him to establish the Centre for Social Justice at the Conservative Party and which produced the Conservatives' 'Breakthrough Britain' policy documents (see www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk).

The kinds of ideas advanced by Smith and Cameron are now central to Conservative Party thinking and give us very strong indications of the likely policy directions of any future Conservative UK government, but which also influence and shape New Labour's plans to overhaul benefit entitlement (DWP, 2008).

### Glasgow East: class racism and class hatred

Returning to some of the earlier themes of this paper, we can see in many of the media and political discourses, which under scored the representation and interpretation of poverty and social problems in Glasgow East, a not too thinly disguised view of people experiencing poverty alternatively as a deficient population, lacking in confidence or even as an 'underclass'. In some important senses, we can interpret the ways in which poverty was represented in Glasgow East (but also as it has surfaced in some of the political responses to gun and knife crime in London and other English cities) as a sign, not only of a return to the underclass discourses of the 1980s and early 1990s, but as a revitalisation of ideological categories which have long been historically embedded in accounts of poverty in the UK. However, there is another aspect to this and this relates to government concerns with the 'white working class' as a marginalised and excluded grouping within UK society. Recently reinvented or rediscovered as a 'problem population' (Runnymede, 2009), white working-class subjects have increasingly been pathologised (for instance in relation to political concerns with anti-social behaviour in general and gang culture in Scotland or 'yob' culture in England more specifically) and coded as problematic in relation to government policies and discourses, for example urban renewal. The white working class are increasingly seen as a class apart. Such arguments have hardened in recent times as New Labour has sought to claim that their policies have 'lifted' all but a relatively few difficult cases out of poverty and otherwise have successfully integrated socially excluded people into 'mainstream' society:

> Just as we congratulate those included in the ranks of the successful, we must never forget these excluded from even the hope of joining them. These are the powerless one . . . we must be honest. For some, those who from generation to generation, are brought up in workless households in poor estates, often poorly educated and frankly sometimes poorly parented the rising tide has not helped lift them. (Blair, 2006)

Ideas of 'poverty amidst affluence' or of a 'rising tide' leaving behind a residual grouping of 'hard to reach' welfare dependents are hardly new in themselves. They have been bolstered, however, by arguments from other New Labour politicians that there is a 'poverty of aspirations' and a culture of dependency that not only distinguishes poor people but confines them to poverty (see for example Murphy, 2007). Glasgow East is a place, in New Labour terms, that suffers from 'aspirational deficit'.

In the story of poverty and social problems in Glasgow East, the failures of macro economic policy, long-term economic change and the structural inequalities of contemporary UK capitalism come to be re- and mis-represented as the consequences of social–cultural limitations for which working-class people experiencing poverty are themselves held to be individually responsible. The language deployed in the portrayal of the population of Glasgow East represents a thinly disguised class hatred, or class racism (Haylett, 2001: 351). While class is rarely invoked explicitly, coded instead by euphemisms such as 'welfare dependency', 'sink estates' and the 'long-term unemployed', it is an absent presence, underpinning the more hostile commentary voiced during the election but also at other times.

During the Glasgow East by-election, New Labour politicians did not indulge in the kind of anti-welfare rhetoric that was central to the Conservative campaign. Labour's campaign was very much run by Labour politicians from the West of Scotland, and, while the Labour candidate in particular was critical of the negative reporting of Glasgow East, nonetheless UK Government announcements concerning another round of welfare reforms invoked ideas of welfare dependency and individualised explanations of poverty. By contrast, even as they spoke in Glasgow, Conservative politicians were not addressing their comments to the voters of Glasgow East (where they came a very poor third in the election), but were directly speaking to voters in their own electoral heartlands far from Glasgow. This was a case of utilising Glasgow East to attack not only Labour nationally – but also state welfare in general. However, the idea of welfare dependency among Scots, indeed of *Scottish* welfare dependency, cosseted by 'English' money, signals other conflicts that have emerged in the years since devolution (see, for example, Allardyce, 2009; Gordon, 2007; Milliband, 2007).

It is also worth noting in passing that the Scottish press did not generally carry stereotypical portrayals of Glasgow East. However, among the journalists writing in UK/English-based papers were a number of Scots – any suggestions, therefore, of an anti-Scottish agenda is more problematic, though Glasgow's long-standing position as some kind of internal exotic locale within the UK resurfaced, and this also is shaped by a latent anti-Scottishness. Another theme which emerged, but which lies outside the scope of this paper, also called upon religious sectarianism in Glasgow, that the constituency, home to Celtic football club, also contained a sizeable and 'tribal' 'Roman Catholic vote' that traditionally was solid Labour (Brady, 2008; Gill, 2008, MacIntrye, 2008). The complex relations between religious affiliation and poverty and deprivation did not receive much attention, other than only by implication.

### Concluding comments: compounding social injustices?

The notion of a 'broken society' appears at first glance to offer a different way of thinking about social problems from the dominant ways in which poverty and poor people were viewed under Tory governments during the 1980s and 1990s. However, as we have seen this is largely underpinned by an individualistic and moralistic view of poor people as a distinctive group apart from 'mainstream' society. Underlining many of the ideas that have been highlighted here is a thinly disguised culture of poverty argument that people experiencing poverty are lacking in the capacity to escape poverty, gripped by fatalism and apathy. Nor is there any sense that some of the lifestyles, of the kind vilified by politicians and journalists in Glasgow East, represent more an adaptation to and accommodation with the reality of life on low income, in poor housing and so on. Voices of local people were relatively few and far in press coverage during the election, unless used to illustrate once more some shocking statistic or feature of the area. Had such voices been given more prominence, these may have reflected diverse survivalist strategies – manipulating or 'playing the system' on the one hand, contrasted with more responsibilised antipathy to welfare on the other. It would be mistaken to think that anti-poor ideas are only alien and external to Glasgow East and of interest also is the ways through which they come to be reproduced and circulate as localised imaginings in areas where poverty is widespread.

The example of the Glasgow East by-election illustrates that those historical representations of poverty as individual behavioural deficits continue to be mobilised in contemporary discourses around welfare and citizenship. In this way boundaries are constructed, maintained and reproduced around long-standing binaries: dependency/independency, active/passive, hard-working/worklessness, mainstream and excluded. Such binaries are also given spatial expression with welfare/social housing ghettos contrasted with normal and or hard-working communities. Thus, the politics of poverty and the politics of place are intertwined.

It would be wrong to suggest that all media coverage of Glasgow East was negative and hostile. There is clear recognition for a few commentators that much of the population is in severe poverty and has many different welfare needs, such as better health care, housing and public services. However, the attention to poverty and disadvantage that have characterised much of the commentary of this by-election was in stark contrast to the relatively low priority the media in the UK generally attach to such issues. This relates to another trend which is becoming more and more evident: poverty features as a matter of interest when related to other issues which are considered more newsworthy – and we have seen this in the Glasgow East example too – particularly crime, anti-social behaviour and youth disorder. In Glasgow East this tended to play out in different ways: there was without doubt a marginalisation of structural accounts of poverty, with the consequences of rising inequalities overlooked. But at the same time there is some difference between those media representations which list negatives and thereby risk reinforcing stereotyped images of particular populations and places, and those accounts which actively seek to peddle specific arguments of welfare dependency and individual failure. Both are damaging – but in different ways. There are lessons here for all of us, while seeking to highlight material poverty and disadvantage, of the danger of replicating regressive ways of thinking. Listing negatives outside a framework which foregrounds structural arguments, inequality and the need for redistribution, leaves us vulnerable to such.

Ruth Lister (2008) among others has repeatedly drawn attention to the effects of misrecognition, of viewing people who are poor as a population apart. Much of the media reporting of Glasgow East was a classic case of such misrecognition. This raises important questions both of social justice and of the social injustices, which the kinds of stereotyping and stigmatisation that have been highlighted in this paper serve to compound and exacerbate.

The key task facing those who seek to explore poverty within the context of social and economic justice, avoiding the kind of 'othering' that we have seen here, is not to persuade the news media to provide more 'positive' images of poverty, but to challenge the stigmatising ideologies that continue to plague discussions of poverty and disadvantage. Ideas of welfare 'dependency', of personal and area 'dysfunctionality' and of 'the poor' as some kind of 'underclass' continue to shape social welfare policies in the UK today. Many of us have been over such ground before – but it would seem that we have to travel this road once more.

## Notes

1 The Scottish National Party emerged victorious capturing a sold 'heartland' Labour seat with a 22.5 per cent vote swing.

2 In December 2008, Glasgow was identified as one of five areas in the UK where new proposals to get incapacity benefit claimants back into work would be piloted. See Peev (2008).

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