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SOCIAL WORK AND "THE SOCIAL": A BIOPOLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

Amid the uncertainty of the current political context and an unprecedented institutional crisis in European welfare, this article offers a theoretical analysis of the problems arising from the historical reshaping of social work as a biopolitical organ of the state. It undertakes this analysis from a biopolitical perspective and asks how this framework can help us in defining the specific features of social work intervention in family life? To properly answer, the article proposes a methodological understanding which explicates a series of relations between "biopolitics – the social – social work". To this end, supported by analyses from Foucault and Donzelot, the article shows how social work as a form of state governmentality intervenes in the lives of families to normalise behaviour and conduct. From a critical vantage point, these findings compel us to re-examine the problem of consent and consensus when working with service users and families in the midst of an increasingly more controlling authoritarian social work.

Key words: biopolitics, normalisation, family life, pastoral power, social work

Biopolitics and "the social"

Biopolitical analysis has yet to fully enter the field of social work. As a term biopolitics is used to denote social, political and economic power over forms of modern life. As a critical concept it transcends conventional ideas of the political by focusing explicitly on questions of everyday life and intimate relations. In this article biopolitics is introduced to lay the foundation for renewed critical engagement with social work and as a theoretical framework to understand processes of normalisation, regulation and subjection as relations of power. Insights provided in the writings of Michel Foucault and his associate Jacques Donzelot's *The Policing of Families* (1979) provide the stimulus for this article. Donzelot's, now classic work, is often overlooked in the recent critical social

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work literature. *The Policing of Families* focuses on a variety of events in France, which span the eighteen and nineteenth century to show how the State increasingly relies on a biopolitical assemblage of power to construct a normalising and individualising rationality, and provide a system of tutelage in which family relations can be regulated and controlled. For Donzelot the term society represents a mechanism of governance (or as Foucault 1991, would call it "governmentality"); it is part of the techniques of power for governing a population. As will be shown the social is inherently political in the way it emerges at a point of intersection of particular forms of knowledge and administrative practices. Curtis (2002) captures the essence of the social in the following:

> We see "the social" as a product of practices, conflicts, and struggles which encouraged the emergence and solidification of a domain of knowledge, of a field of exercise of power, and an object of political administration (2002: 85).

As its infrastructural support, social work along with human service experts (such as counsellors, mentors, child psychologists, health visitors, educational welfare and school attendance officers, child guidance clinicians, probation officers and community workers) belong to this domain which Donzelot calls "the social". In historically identifying the "invention of the social" he is referring to a distinct sector in Western societies which deals with diverse "social" problems, implementing wide ranging "social" policies and "social" interventions which specifies an objective field for which it practices upon. Other writers, such as Nikolas Rose (1996), treats this concept of "the social" as primarily a space of disciplinary enclosures where elements of population are grouped together and subjected to various forms of expert treatment. This sector of society, in dealing with social norms and problems, cannot be conceived in isolation from other sectors, rather it must be understood as entangled with other human services such as medicine, education, psychiatry and law. Here we have what Foucault (1972) refers to as a "play of dependencies" in which the collective boundaries of the social – whose objects range from social hygiene, health promotion, birth rates, pedagogy, "good enough parenting", sexual taboos, moral discipline and more lately bordering practices with destitute migrants – aim to regulate and normalise the domestic home as a "normal" site of medically, psychologically and legally informed upbringing of children. For example, we have observed during the recent COVID-19 pandemic how "cleanliness" has been normalised as a moral and hygienic requirement through handwashing. Here, handwashing becomes a pre-requisite for good citizenship and compliance. While it must be recognised that there are many differences between Poland, France and Britain in the deployment of the normalising strategies of the social, general structural similarities involving biopolitical forms of power are apparent and discussed below.

It will be instructive to unpack this complex dimension of modern life referred to as "the social". According to Donzelot, the social is characterised by a network of intricate relations, whose programmatic aim is to construct and impose a normative form of life in the domain of the family by providing a sense of security, safety and insurance

against crisis. This requires different agency interventions of social work, education and health care agencies. In Britain these are known as the "tri-partite" system of care which combine a different but related set of operations upon individuals and families. Donzelot argues that:

> For "the social" is not society understood as the set of material and moral conditions that characterise a form of consolidation. It would appear rather to be the set of means which allow social life to escape material pressures and politico-moral uncertainties; the entire range of methods which make the members of society relatively safe from the effects of economic fluctuations by providing a certain security – which give their existence possibilities of relations that are flexible enough, to avert the dislocation that divergencies of interest and beliefs would entail. And perhaps the most surprising thing is the status "the social" has won in our heads, as something we take for granted (1979: xxvi).

From the above it can be argued that the social while amorphous in form, no longer immediately coincides with relations of production as reproduced in capitalist systems or corresponding property law which helps to secure it. It also suggests that the social be analysed as a circuit of knowledge production and practical intervention, of representations, devices and practices that institutionalise relations of power, of calculations that guide actions that aim to solve problems, and so on. Social policy and social work play a co-ordinating and functional role in formulation of the social. To understand the relation between "the social" and social work, we need to understand how the former performs a relatively autonomous set of functions and occupies a distinct role in the structure of modern societies. For example, whilst acknowledging the significance of the reproduction of labour power within the family, Donzelot is more concerned to link devices of intervention upon familial life and show how these are the result of the so-called inabilities of families to perform appropriate normative roles and functions. He claimed that the social does not stop at the doorstep of the family household but traverses this arena by addressing a whole set of interdependent issues, such a mental and physical health, sexual norms, welfare legal rights, death rates and social mobility. As part of Foucault called "biopolitical assemblages" the social performs a crucial role in population management, with social work a key agency in this function. As shown below many biopolitical practices of population management find their roots in Christian theology. For example, for St. Thomas Aquinas, obedience is the most "praiseworthy" of the moral virtues because obedience means that our will is directed towards God's will and his laws (Shaw 2002). Obedient and productive biopolitical subjects are the goal of these normalising agencies. According to Donzelot an important function of the social is to constantly define what is normal and rational in people's daily lives. This provides a means of stabilisation and legitimation for the caring professions since they both problematise and normativise familial behaviours, performances, and dispositions.

Contrary to Marxist analyses, for Donzelot, the state in not just a source of social control, but the effect of a hybrid of complex power relations which are not to be defined merely in terms of relations of production and do not always originate in some repressive

apparatus at the centre. According to Donzelot, interventions in the family are to be accounted for in terms of discrete influences which bear directly on the family as a unit which needs to be regulated. These interventions are largely a matter of management, planning and administrative steering and not merely political measures. However, as will be shown below various devices relating to risk management, security and safety are also at stake in the social worker's arsenal. The policing operations performed by state institutions, such as social work, are not always openly coercive but more often than not organise the affairs of the state with a view to increasing the life chances and welfare of its citizens and are thus to be conceived as positivities of power. By this is meant a productive form of power which incites families to align their conduct to social norms. Rose (1990) examines the historical processes that underpin these productive forms of power in relation to family life in achieving "subjective commitment" to good enough parenting. Typically, social work plays a decisive role in this operation through attachment theory as a device for emotionally binding parents to their children through parenting skill enhancement programmes. With this form of power, the social displays a transformative influence on its target populations, albeit an erratic and arbitrary one. For instance, in Britain, the establishment of the National Health Service in 1948, by the post-war Labour government was a marked improvement in the provision of health care and thus should be read as a move towards greater social justice. Similarly, while containing many assumptions about full employment and definitions of poverty, the British social security system, as formulated in the Beveridge Report (1942) improved the material conditions and life-chances of many of the so called "undeserving poor". A more mundane example is social work's preoccupation with self-improvement and empowering self-esteem. Historically, it is important to recognise that the novel forms of State power investigated by Foucault and Donzelot are evidence of a shift from "disciplinary power" to biopolitics, and that as a corollary of this change, social work's function in the field of the social is to be understood as entirely biopolitical in nature. Biopolitics links control and political command with risk factors of statistically produced populations as a distinctive form of power. In contrast to disciplining, biopolitics turns power's grasp from the coercive control of the individual subject to "life itself" (Clough 2008). The differential exposure of human beings to health and social risks is, according to Foucault (2003), a salient feature of biopolitical governmentality. As he explains: "So after a first seizure of power over the body in an individualising mode, we have a second seizure of power that it not individualizing, but, if you like, massifying, that is directed not as man-as-body but at man-as-species" (2003: 243). It goes without saying that this seizure or capture of both individual and species mass in biopolitical control is ultimately capitalist capture in its liberal Western versions. Regimes of biopolitical capture aim to enhance the productive capacity of populations. Eugene Thacker argues that "biopolitics accounts for 'each and every' element of the population, the individual and the group, and the groups within the group (the poor, the unemployed, the resident alien, and the chronically ill)" (2005: 25). He goes on to claim that while populations "can exist in a variety of contexts, defined by territory, economic class groupings, ethnic groupings, gender-based divisions,

they do so within a framework analysing the flux of biological activity characteristic of the population" (2005: 25). Population has a life and specific density of its own, to which the techniques of power must adapt themselves and which they mobilise their operations. It is important to remember that the biopolitics of population is also, and crucially, a matter of governing mobility – and immobility. This is spelt out most clearly in European immigration policies and bordering practices in their differing contexts.

We can summaries this section by noting that the point at which political economy is locked into the field of the social it is overtly concentrated on "life itself". In the case of Donzelot it is family life and the socialisation of children and parents. From this vantage point, the social can be seen as a calculating machine, marking out and classifying various populations in order to estimate the value of their capacities to live healthily for the appropriation of the capitalist regime. In order to fully unpack the processes involved in this concentration of biopolitical power we must turn to the specific techniques of power utilised by the social. These are referred to as originating in Christian pastoral power, and indeed this distinctive form of power, which constituted, new types of subjectification, or "inward enforcements" (see: Herbert 1671), can be understood as a prelude to contemporary social work skills and values. From this vantage point we can more decisively trace the precise meeting point of the functions of the social to social work. As will be shown below, the originality of this permits us to explicate a series of relations between "biopolitics – the social – social work".

The function of "the social" as pastoral power

This section examines more closely to function of 'the social' as a form of pastoral power. Given that the social cannot be simply equated with the working of a capitalist economic order and its related political structures, as many Marxists would maintain, it is necessary to ask how the social – as a functionary in the biopolitical assemblage – is distinct from other spheres in modern societies?

The assemblage of the social utilises a distinctive technique of power, which is mirrored in contemporary social work interventions. This technique, is for Donzelot and Foucault, called "pastoral power" which has its roots in moral concepts of duty in the theory and practice of Christian liturgy. Its modern-day form has changed from its earlier conception. While it was originally aimed to assure individual salvation into the next world, its new objective is to ensure it in this world. In modernity, Christian pastoral power has become the model ethical subject. We can detect this above all in Kantian ethics which decisively influenced the British Association of Social Work code of ethics with its liberal idea of persons as (i) rational; (ii) autonomous; (iii) ends in themselves (McBeath, Webb 1989). Thus, social workers are instructed to concern themselves with physical and psychological well-being, healthy diets and minds, security against disability, cruelty and negligence. The pastoral techniques of power are not confined to the state – although the police, the probation and social services are – but it is often

composed on private, voluntary and philanthropic institutions. In Britain, "War on Want" and "National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children", and in Poland "Die Arche" and "Caritas" are all examples of charitable forms of pastoralism. Each of these pastoral techniques is "action-based". That is, they offer guidance, advice, mentoring, instruction and treatment and thus have built-in regimes of normality, deviance and sickness which usually require some eradication action. As mentioned above, it is in this sense that the institutions of the social are both normative and normalising. The main thrust of their interventions is oriented towards equipping individuals, families and communities with the means of adjusting and coping with the demands of modern life. This explicitly functional conception of the social, presupposes that the values it aims to procure are unified and shared by all with a common set of aims and trajectories "to be normal" or to "seek optimal levels of improvement". The action-based approach provides definitions of psychological abnormality which are accompanied with guidelines about the possibility to change towards normality – how to be better father or mother, how to achieve more at school and so forth.

The identification of social misfits, deviants and "maladjusted" groups is measured, calculated and statistically risk assessed in terms of their difference to those considered to be "normal" groups within the population. This is exemplified in site policies for gypsies and travelling people, which accentuate the differences between "us" and "them" in terms of hygiene, social skills and educatability (Kourova, Webb 2019). These normative agendas confirm that something has to be done about so-called problematic populations such as Roma and destitute migrants. The action-based approach guarantees a sort of moral veracity, in that they can claim that are actively doing something about the problems. This is the pay-off for both society and the multiplicity of social technologies which engage in the process of colonising problematic groups. Being on the "front-line" or probing the depths of the inner cities also means that they are able to justify their service ideal. In the first place it guarantees credibility (or "street cred" as it is called in British slang) since practitioners have a special local knowledge of service users; and secondly, this ideal supposes that the agencies of the social have little interest in the personal or collective benefits from the services they provide. This is sometimes dramatised as a form of self-sacrifice, often accompanied with a supererogatory commitment in the service ideal that it is only the service users who benefit (see: Wilensky 1964).

In Foucault's much acclaimed lecture series presented at the College de France in 1978 called *Security, Territory, Population* (STP) he laid out a framework for understanding how pastoral power translates into modern forms of expert social practice. STP (published in English in 2009), traces the historical rise of the Christian pastorate as a technology of power and describes how its transposition into "secular" statist regimes occurs in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe. In the Seventh Lecture of STP, Foucault explains how the "specificity of Christian pastorate" is constituted. In this sense pastoral power is conceived as a normalising and regulatory type of power. To explain, here, I paraphrase Ben Golder's (2007) summary of the *Seventh Lecture*.

He explains how pastoral power is characterised by Foucault as comprising of four elements: first, the principle of "analytical responsibility," according to which for Foucault the pastor must account for "every act of each of his sheep, for everything that may have happened between them, and everything good and evil they may have done at any time" (1978: 167); secondly, the principle of what Foucault calls "exhaustive and instantaneous transfer" whereby the merits and demerits of every individual member of the flock are imputed to the pastor, in this individualising strategy; thirdly, the principle of "sacrificial reversal," under which the pastor must be prepared to sacrifice himself in order to save his sheep; and finally, the principle of "alternate correspondence," according to which the merits of the sheep, and their prospects of salvation, are increased in inverse proportion to the failings of their pastor, and in turn the pastor rises in the eyes of the Lord (and will assure his own salvation) if he has struggled with a recalcitrant flock (Golder 2007: 166). Like the social worker, the pastor is a "relay" of surveillance and compliance, and the promoter of reflexive and self-governing subjects (Martin, Waring 2018). While pastoral power is distinctive in its individualising tactics, with each treated as a particular case, it also entails a complex reciprocity that binds the pastor and his sheep, with "the pastor exercising a precise and meticulous accounting of the actions of each and all of his charges in order to assure their salvation" (2007: 167). Just like the social worker, the Christian pastor enacts a subtle economy of merit and fault. While pastoral power did not transfer directly to early Victorian social work, it did give rise to "an art of conducting, directing, leading, guiding, taking in hand, and manipulating men, an art of monitoring them and urging them on step by step, an art with the function of taking charge of men collectively and individually" (1978: 165). Foucault calls this governmentality and goes on to link this to the emergence of the modern state:

> The modern state is born, I think, when governmentality becomes a calculated and reflected practice. The Christian pastorate seems to me to be in the background of this process (1978: 165).

Social work and the field of the social

We have seen how the Church and pastoral power serves as the historical background to modern forms of biopolitical power. However, there is no direct transfer of types of power from the Church to the welfare state. As Golder explains "technologies of pastoralism multiply, overflow their hitherto strictly ecclesiastical economy and begin to invest in the field of political sovereignty" (2007: 168). Foucault describes how the new political technology of the police increasingly intervenes in the daily of lives of the subjects of a state. Broadly, we can discern how social work comes to bridge the technologies of policing and pastoral power. Social work is a manifestation of the theological grounds of modern state power. Put crudely, it resembles a secularised political theology. Moreover, from the above description of the four elements of pastoral power we

can see how this technology is a prelude to modern forms of social work by identifying a broad correlation between:

–   Pastoral power/ Social work intervention,
–   Analytical responsibility/ Risk assessment,
–   Exhaustive and instantaneous transfer/ Case management,
–   Sacrificial reversal/ Empowerment devices,
–   Alternate correspondence/ Reflective practise.

One obvious manner to assess the way in which, in the supposedly secular context of social work, these pastoral modalities of analytic responsibility, exhaustive transfer, sacrificial reversal and alternate correspondence are deployed as modes of subjectification and qualification in the normalisation of family life. The beginnings of this undertaking are sketched out in the section that follows. To summarise, for both Foucault and Donzelot pastoral power is reshaped and modified in its modern version and it takes on two distinctive components. The first component, the *welfare apparatus* – which is proliferated by social work through biopolitical coercive and normalising devices – is, according to Donzelot is gendered:

> Donzelot maintains that the relationship between families and the state has taken a particular gendered form primarily through an alliance between mothers and state agencies such as social work in pursuit of child health, education and development. This means that through what is called the "welfare apparatus", a "supervisory regime", staffed by welfare professionals is created. Although ostensibly always "caring", it has a coercive role that derives its authority from the law, and can, in extreme circumstances, impose its will on both parents and children (Hendrick 2005: 33).

Donzelot appears to locate the blame for the demise of the patriarchal family on middle-class women social workers, whom he claims collaborated with the physicians, health experts and welfare technicians (Pestaña 2012). The second component, the medical-hygienist apparatus increasingly regulated working-class birth rates and introduced norms of "civilised" family life, sustained by women and children. For example, Webb (2007) shows how social workers in late Victorian England focused on the minutiae of working-class family life such as table manners and cutlery layout, undergarment etiquette for girls and healthy diets for young working men. The promotion of marriage among workers would allow them to adapt to the demands of urban industrialised life. As Parton (1994) observed the relational axis between social work and the social is intrinsically political and embedded in biopolitical relations of power. He claims that social work:

> developed as a hybrid in the space, the "social" (Donzelot 1988), between the private sphere of the household and the public sphere of the state and society. It operated in an intermediary zone. It produced and was reproduced by new relations between the law, social security, medicine, the school and the family (Parton 1994: 10).

Making the case of the "problem family"

Casework files, correspondence between social work practitioners and service-users and minutes of child-care proceedings provide a vantage point to empirically test Donzelot's thesis about the policing of families as it relates to social work. This requires a concentration on the empirical scope of the presuppositions that underlie Donzelot's work and its capacity to move beyond commentary to address directly social work practices. A particularly relevant focus here is the idea of "problem families" which was widely circulated in social work discourse between 1945 and the early 1980s (Garrett 2007). The "problem family" discourse classified parents and family life as internally chaotic, unhygienic, socially excluded and morally bereft. The term "problem families" was first used in 1943 by the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI) (Merricks 2014). As a post-war idea it can also be traced to A.S. Neil's influential book of the same title *Problem Families* published in 1949 and the Eugenicist classification of families in the early 1940s. Typically, "problem families" are defined in pejorative terms with an interventionist focus on their performance and "ineducatability". The early literature describes the children of "problem families" as "dull and feeble minded" (Wofinden 1946; Blacker 1953). The study cited below commissioned by the Eugenics Society gives a flavour of this perspective:

> All the surveys seem to show that the problem family is a reality, though the causes are complex, involving mental sub-normality, temperamental instability, ineducability, squalid homes, too large families (Blacker 1953: 12).

In the UK the term "problem family" has been increasingly supplanted by the equally dubious term "troubled families" (Crossley 2018; Wheelan 2019). Lambert claims that:

> Commentators were quick to make comparisons with historic efforts to rehabilitate "problem families" in the post-war period. However, beyond discursive similarities, there are also marked continuities in how family policies have been developed and implemented (2019: 82).

He concludes that "fluctuating 'problem' and 'troubled' family mechanisms in Britain since 1945 have been caught between policing 'families in trouble' and safeguarding 'children at risk'" (2019: 88). The discussion below draws on Lambert's (2017) earlier historical study of "problem families" in the North West of England. For this research, which focuses on everyday decision-making by practitioners, he uses correspondence and documentation from case files, along with organisational records of statutory and voluntary organisations involved in operationalising the "problem family" (see: Kanios 2016). According to Lambert:

> Central to referrals was a view that "problem families" could be prevented or rehabilitated by domestic instruction. Social workers wedded to a model of diagnosis and treatment which saw the problem and solution of the "problem family" in gendered domestic incapability (2017: 119).

A children's social worker referring to a young working-class mother she felt that "The state of the home can be directly related to [Mrs NO's] state of mind" (Lambert 2017: 119). She continued that she "was concerned about the cleanliness of the house and children and the state of the furnishings. While there are strong bonds of affections the problem lies with the parents who are handicapped by inadequate personalities" (2017: 121). Discipline, or lack thereof, is often regarded as a significant problem by social workers. Below is a social workers account of Mrs EEW, who was "known" to the children's services department:

> The parents do love their children and very much want them. Unfortunately, this is not nearly enough. Over the years the family have become isolated from the community and built up an anti-authority attitude which is transmitted to the children (2017: 122).

Co-operation with the practitioner can sometimes result in increased eligibility status for state welfare benefits. Lambert notes that maternal incapability is often cited as a root cause of "problem families" by social workers. Inadequate maternal care, couched as the mother's "an inability to cope", is often cited as a significant factor in the persistence of the "problem family". Starkey (2000) also comments that mother blaming is common, and efforts at intervention and rehabilitation with "problem families" is channelled around domesticity, childcare and housekeeping. One case lodged before the "problem family" committee notes that the mother "refuses to take responsibility for her eldest daughter's actions" (2017: 125), with the son referred to a psychiatrist with "school phobia". The report reads as follows:

> I think it likely that he is a boy who has not been trained to normal standards of behaviour, that he is weak and runs away from obstacles. The only recommendation that one can make here is to advise some form of legal sanctions to compel the boy to attend school and to hold the mother responsible (2017: 125).

As a feature of this gendered parenting stereotyping, the parent's "character" is frequently cited in social work assessments of "problem families":

> The family came to the notice of the Children's Department firstly as a "rent case" about two years ago. Collection was arranged and [Mrs MD] had paid regularly. It became apparent that there was a mental problem and eventually [her husband] deserted her. He probably was not a very stable character and is rather frightened of anyone in authority or official position (2017: 187).

Although material deprivation and poverty are often the principal reason for the involvement of social services, the "problems" are inevitably framed in behavioural diagnostic and prescribed terms, such as the mother's lack of motivation, and as unable to take an active interest in the welfare of her child. The following is typical of the moralising discourse of a social worker in reporting on a young mother:

> As this is a council house (owned by the local state), I think the Housing Department should issue a stern warning to the tenant for the place to be cleaned up. Present conditions do not indicate that [Mrs FL] made much use of her training (2017: 133).

"Constructive training" along the lines of strict supervision are often regarded as the behavioural solution to household management, with the supposed knock-on effect of alleviating deprivation and poverty. However, when dealing with "problem families" individual practitioners often embrace strictly behavioural understandings which frame the "problem" as the family itself. Behaviour and behavioural performance are the targets for intervention with little regard to wider social and economic contexts. Lambert summarises: "Rehabilitation of the 'problem family' was a solution-driven process" (2017: 146).

The New Labour government introduced family intervention projects (FIPs) and SURE Start programmes in the UK to rehabilitate and modify the behaviour of "problem families" and reinforce the necessity for the "proper management of the home" (Parr 2009). Wood (2014) describes how these were modelled on the Dundee Families Project in Scotland:

> The FIPs were explicit about sanctions from an early stage, insisting that families sign a contract (termed a "behaviour support agreement") with their key worker which set out behaviour which was expected of them… The parenting policy appears to have been influenced by the desire to take a firm stance against anti-social behaviour (2014: 45–46).

What Lambert's (2017) historical case material reveals about interventions into family life is that there is no uniform tend of "state intervention" but rather the post-war emergence, at a multitude of sites in the social body, of professional practitioners of health, crime and social work aimed at governing the domestic sphere. Networks which govern the family, though what Latour (1987) calls "centres of calculation", are multiple. Latour's concept emphasises the venues in which knowledge production builds upon the accumulation of resources through circulatory movements to other places (for example, between office and home) (Jöns 2011). Social work as a powerful actor and institution deploys interventionist strategies, based on particular circumstances obtaining in family life, to enrol and mobilise parents and children in pursuit of its normalising goals. As Rose and Miller argue power in this sense is "the outcome of the affiliation of persons, spaces, communication and inscriptions into a durable form" (1992: 184). Social work forged an alignment between political rationalities and the technologies for the regulation of family life that took shape in Britain during the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. It continues to do so under new guises and policies such as the Troubled Families programme. This programme is a new dynamic to an old problem: state and social service responses to experiences of maladjusted families. The UK government policy document defines the remit of the programme:

> The Troubled Families Programme (henceforth the "TF Programme" or "Programme") is a programme of targeted intervention for families with multiple problems, including crime, anti-social behaviour, truancy, unemployment, mental health problems and domestic abuse (2020: 3).

Through moral agents such as social workers, these increasingly standardised programmes seek to create normalised locales, families and children able to operate a regulated autonomy. Rose and Miller go on to say, "these reorganised programmes of government utilise and instrumentalise the multitude of experts for the management of family life" (1992: 201).

Conclusion

Social work fundamentally serves to achieve normalising outcomes according to Donzelot. A crucial part of this operation is through the classification and assessment of service users. Crucially, social work must identify "families at risk" (Webb 2006). Pestaña (2012) summarises the processes and devices entailed in this operation:

> First, the social inquiry is an "inquisitorial" type of knowledge accumulation that attempts to monitor complaints from the family. The social inquiry endeavoured to control all the knowledge about the family that existed in social, educational or prison administrations. Thereafter, the family members are "interrogated" separately and the different versions are contrasted. Finally, home visits allow for verification of precisely how the family lives: "A technique that mobilises a minimum of coercion to obtain a maximum of verified information" (134).

The historical case material drawn from Lambert's analysis, shows that social work is a striking illustration of the biopolitical strategy of governing "from below" whereby agents of the state are intimately connected with calculation, control and direction as micro practices of self-reflection in family life. This biopolitical strategy can also be observed in work with older people. In her analysis of working with older people Tomkow (2018) shows how the concept of frailty is locked into biopolitical regimes of classification. By narrating older people as a cost, a threat or a burden, increasing age is commonly constructed in relation to risk, which augments the discourses around older people's vulnerabilities representing both a burden and a threat. Frailty is presented as a "truth discourse" which supposedly describes an objective condition for older people. She argues that this is driven by the ability of frailty measurements to predict risk of costly adverse outcomes; the capability of frailty scores to enumerate complex needs; and the scientific legitimacy frailty affords to geriatric medicine. Consequently, frailty has become pervasive, knowable and measurable (Tomkow 2018: 5). The analysis of social work as a biopolitical apparatus allows us to take an important step in tracking the developmental nature of social work in relation to its biopolitical function. Biopolitical analysis provides a nuanced focus for

social workers to investigate the network of power relations, knowledge practices and modes of subjectification evident in normalisation processes. From a critical vantage point the findings presented in this article compel us to re-examine the problem of consent and consensus when working with service users and families in the midst of an increasingly more controlling authoritarian social work.

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