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The Geographies of Poverty and Welfare

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Abstract

This article provides a critical review of recent geographical work on the themes of poverty and welfare. It begins with a discussion of the historical development of welfare geography and the recent resurgence of interest in welfare geographies within and beyond the discipline. Attention then shifts to the definitional complexities of poverty and, in particular, some of the difficulties associated with conventional labellings of poverty, poor people and poor places. The next section of the paper explores the relations between poverty, space and place with reference to recent work on the changing spatial distributions of poverty, socio-spatial forms of polarisation and the complex relations between poverty and place. This is followed by a discussion of welfare geographies, within which the spatial underpinnings and impacts of recent programmes of welfare reform are considered. The article ends by pointing to some new geographical agendas for welfare research.

1 *Introduction: Rediscovering the Geographies of Poverty and Welfare*

> As geographers we have a special role – a truly creative and revolutionary one – that of helping to reveal the *spatial* malfunctionings and injustices, and contributing to the design of a spatial form of society in which people can be really free to fulfil themselves. (Smith 1977, 373)

Geographical perspectives on poverty have a long history in some countries [see, for example, the place-based accounts of poverty in English cities by Booth (1889) and Rowntree (1901)]. It was not until the 1970s, though, that poverty and welfare began to be taken seriously within human geography as a growing number of geographers turned their attention to the 'spatial malfunctionings' of society and the geographical dimensions of poverty and other forms of social inequality (Coates et al. 1977; Colenutt 1970; Morrill and Wohlenberg 1970; Peet 1975). At the same time, important attempts were made to raise the profile of 'human welfare' within the discipline. In his agenda-setting book on welfare geography, Smith (1977) argued that 'if human beings are the object of our curiosity in human geography, then the quality of their lives is of paramount interest' (p. 363). To progress this welfare agenda, it was claimed that a new type of human geography was required; one that was more relevant, humanistic and interventionist in nature and also drew on broader and more critical social scientific approaches to inequality and injustice (see Knox 1975; Smith 1977).

Moving forward a couple of decades, rumblings about the neglected state of welfare geography were again apparent in the mid-1990s. One discontent was Leyshon (1995), who used the omission of the term 'poverty' from the recently published *Dictionary of Human Geography* to fire an important warning shot about human geography's direction of travel. While able to identify recent published geographical work on poverty, he claimed that emerging 'cultural turns' within the discipline were deflecting critical attention away from the social geographies of welfare. Leyshon's intervention was important

in highlighting the marginalisation of poverty within human geography at this time. Beneath the surface of published works included in his review, though, there were indications of more positive futures for welfare geography. Not only was an important book on the geography of poverty in the UK (Philo 1995) in press when his article was published but there were other signs of renewed geographical interest in poverty and welfare in countries such as the UK and the USA.

By the mid-1990s it was becoming clear that recent processes of economic restructuring and associated reforms of national welfare systems were increasing levels of inequality and producing new forms of poverty, some of which were becoming more visible within the spaces of the city (see Davis 1990; Mingione 1996; Wacquant 1993; Wolch and Dear 1993). In addition, welfare reform was changing established relationships between the central and local welfare states, and incorporating new non-state actors into the welfare system, creating new geographical agendas for welfare research. The mid-1990s also heralded a key transition in European social policy discourse, prompted in part by the European Commission's reconfiguration of its social welfare programmes around the concept of social exclusion. With a broader focus on the social *and* geographical contexts of poverty (as well as other forms of disadvantage), increasing engagements with ideas of social exclusion began to bring the relationship between poverty and place to the attention of social policy researchers (see Alcock 2007; Lister 2004).

It is possible to identify two other factors that have helped raise the profile of welfare geography since the mid-1990s. First, there has been an increased availability of local data on income – provided by government and commercial organisations – and improvements in geographic information systems (GIS) tools for interrogating and presenting these data, which have facilitated the production of more sophisticated accounts of the changing spatial distribution of poverty. Second, within recent debates about the (social and policy) relevance of human geography in the UK, there have been calls for welfare agendas to be taken more seriously. One example of this type of intervention was Martin's (2001) discussion of the relations between geography and public policy in which he laments the neglected state of welfare geography and argues that 'the improvement of socioeconomic welfare has to be *one of the primary aims of the discipline*' (p. 190, original emphasis; see also Dorling and Shaw 2002; Martin 2002; Massey 2001, 2002).

The intention of this paper is to review key themes emerging from published geographical work on poverty and welfare in western countries during the last decade or so, focusing in particular on the USA and the UK (where most work has been undertaken). The paper is structured around fours sections. The first discusses the definitional complexities of poverty and, more specifically, some of the dangers associated with conventional categorisations of poor people and poor places. The second section explores the shifting relations between poverty, space and place with reference to recent work on the changing spatial distributions of poverty, socio-spatial forms of polarisation, and the complex relations between poverty and place. Third, attention is given to welfare geographies and, more particularly, the spatial underpinnings and impacts of recent programmes of welfare reform. The paper ends by pointing to important imbalances and gaps in existing geographical accounts of poverty and welfare, and suggesting some new agendas for research on these themes.

2 *Categorising Poor People and Poor Spaces: Some Questions of Interpretation*

It is now widely recognised that, in the context of western countries, poverty is best defined in relative terms. Although this approach does not deny the existence of absolute

forms of poverty within contemporary society, rising income levels and standards of living during the last few decades have meant that it is now more appropriate to approach poverty as a relative concept (Townsend 1979). This involves positioning poor people's situations within a broader context of societal norms and expectations – relating to minimum/modal income levels or the (in)ability of households to secure those goods and services deemed as necessities by society (see Gordon et al. 2006). This conventional approach to defining poverty, though, has been criticised for its reliance on normative and statistical forms of classification. 'First-hand' accounts of poverty, based on 'poor' people's own understandings of their situations, present a more complex picture of the meanings of poverty. For example, Beresford et al. (1999) highlight how people normatively defined as poor often discuss their situations in terms that undermine a relative definition of poverty (see also Veness's (1993) account of 'homeless' people's constructions of their situations as a state of 'unhome').

More recently, Vasilachis de Gialdino (2006) has provided a broader critique of conventional categorisations of poverty. She argues that the dominant approach to defining poverty has been developed through the *Epistemology of the Knowing Subject*, which emphasises both the economic, social and cultural differences between different population groups (the poor and non-poor) and the commonalities between individuals in similar situations (such as poverty). In addition, Vasilachis de Gialdino claims that these categorisations reflect the dominant values of capitalist societies, compounding 'certain ways of knowing, considering, and even accepting, justifying and reproducing the differences existing in these societies' (p. 483). What this approach fails to recognise, she suggests, are the 'essential components of poor people's identity (which is common to all human beings), the respects in which they resemble the researcher and the positive features that distinguish them from other people and groups' (p. 483).

Vasilachis de Gialdino contrasts this approach with one that emerges from the *Epistemology of the Known Subject*, within which poor people are constructed less as a distinct social category and more as individuals whose positions within a range of networks effectively deprive them of different types of goods and services. This approach rejects external categorisations of poverty that fail to reflect poor people's own understandings of their situations, favouring instead a more sensitive and multi-purpose approach which is firmly rooted in the life-worlds of the poor:

> The difference between this and other definitions lies in its purpose, which is not simply to know or measure poverty situations in order to overcome, alleviate or avoid them, but to reveal how poor people live, perceive their situation, and think it should be modified. It aims to show the way in which they see themselves and those they interact with, how they define the actions of the latter and interpret the world around them. It also seeks to show how their ways of knowing set limits to the notions and concepts with which the observer approaches them, which usually prevent them from freely displaying their identity. (Vasilachis de Gialdino 2006, p. 484)

Definitional problems linked to the social dimensions of poverty are compounded by difficulties associated with the classification of poor spaces. The dominant approach to spatial classification involves calculating the proportion of the population in particular spatial categories – regions, local government areas or census tracts – living below a specific income threshold. Poor spaces are then defined in relation to either a particular concentration of poverty (in the USA a 40 per cent threshold is commonly utilised) or to the distribution of poverty levels – for example, spaces positioned in the top quintile of poverty levels. I want to suggest that this approach to the categorisation of poor places is problematic for four reasons. First, it is based on proportional rather than absolute levels

of poverty; that is, it emphasises spatial concentrations of poor people in particular (inner-city) spaces and downplays the presence of poverty in other (urban and rural) places where poor people are present in equally significant numbers but tend to be resident in more socially mixed places or more dispersed across space. Second, research conducted over several decades has shown that many places categorised as 'poor' by statistical analyses have minorities of their populations living below the poverty line and are characterised by considerable internal diversity in terms of income and social groups (see Sessoms and Wolch 2008; Townsend 1979).

A third problem is that conventional spatial analyses of poverty are concerned more with the identification of spatial *patterns* of poverty than with the explanation of *processes* underlying these patterns. Writing about the spatial distribution of poverty in the USA, Kodras (1997) argues that this distribution should be seen less as depicting 'an ebb and flow of lassitude among the nation's population' and more as reflecting 'transformations in the country's economic and political geography, the structural landscapes of prosperity and poverty moulded by the market and the state' (p. 68). Indeed, place-based studies of poverty in the USA reveal a multiplicity of structural processes and experiences of poverty in places recording similar levels of low income (Crump 2002). Finally, Powell et al. (2001) suggest that spatial analyses of poverty tend to position individuals in space according to their (low) incomes without taking into account the differential local contexts of their situations, such as costs of living, levels of welfare funding and 'the other benefits or penalties [that] compound the advantages or disadvantages of particular groups by virtue of where they live…' (p. 244).

3 The Changing Spaces and Places of Poverty

That poverty represents a relevant category of investigation for geographers is beyond doubt. It is estimated that 37 million Americans and 13 million people in the UK were living below the official poverty line in 2006–2007 (Palmer 2009; US Census Bureau 2009). In addition, the poverty totals in both countries have increased during the last few years and this upward trend is likely to remain as the global recession continues to swell the jobless total. Beyond these headline statistics, it is clear that poverty has a distinctive geography in these countries (Glasmeier et al. 2008). In the USA, the official poverty rate for metropolitan areas differs between the suburbs (9 per cent, 2007) and the central city (16.5 per cent). Poverty also has a significance presence in rural America, with 15.4 per cent of people in non-metropolitan spaces living below the poverty line (US Census Bureau 2009). In the UK, there is a marked differential between poverty levels in urban and rural areas – with the poverty rate for major urban districts standing at 26 per cent (2004–2007) compared with 18 per cent for rural districts (Palmer 2009). While noting these spatial differences in poverty rates, it should also be recognised that poverty has a significant presence in a broad range of inner-city, urban and rural places within these countries. Indeed, it is estimated that 21 million of the 37 million Americans living in poverty in 2007 were living beyond the boundaries of the central city (US Census Bureau 2009).

There is also a pronounced regional dimension to the incidence of poverty in both countries. In the USA, recent research highlights that most high-poverty counties are found in 'the Black Belt and Mississippi Delta in the South, in Appalachia, the lower Grande Valley, and counties containing Indian Reservations in the Southwest and Great Plains' (Weber et al. 2005, 382). 'The fact that these geographies of poverty have remained largely consistent across several decades has led some to suggest that ''place

matters'' in generating and maintaining poverty' (Weber 2005, 379; see also Partridge and Rickman 2006). In the UK, there has been much coverage of regional variations in levels of poverty during the last few decades (see Green 1994; Martin 1988; Townsend 1979). What emerges from this work is the persistence of a 'North–South divide' in the UK, with highest levels of poverty generally found in the old industrial towns and cities in the middle and northern parts of the country, and lowest levels in the southern areas and the south-east in particular. The exception is London, which consistently records the highest rate of poverty. Although this 'North–South divide' can be identified across several decades, it is claimed that there now exists as much difference within as between regions, leading to questions about the usefulness of a regional classification of poverty in the UK (Dorling et al. 2007). Indeed, it was political claims about these intra-regional differences that, in part, prompted Massey's (2001) recent intervention about the relevance of geography.

Other work has discussed increasing socio-spatial inequalities in particular (global) cities. Important here has been Sassen's (1991) account of social polarisation in New York, London and Tokyo in which she points to the significance of specific forms of economic growth and restructuring in these cities in producing new forms of socio-spatial polarisation. In particular, Sassen suggests that a shift from manufacturing to service sector employment has increased the number of high status professional and low skill manual workers within the service sector, and led to more pronounced polarisation of income and occupational groups within these places. Although more recent studies of other (global) cities also indicate increasing social polarisation, they suggest that consideration needs to be given to the role of the state in mediating processes of economic restructuring. Hamnett (1996), for example, argues that there exist key differences between processes of social polarisation in USA and UK situations which relate to the operation of different national welfare state regimes in these countries, and research on labour market differentiation in London (May et al. 2007) highlights how the state, through its welfare, labour market and immigration policies, is accentuating social polarisation within the city, as well as creating a new reserve army of migrant labour.

3.1 PLACES OF POVERTY AND THE POVERTIES OF PLACE

Some of the most interesting material on the geographies of poverty has emerged from qualitative place-based studies of poverty. These studies have largely focused on the nature and experiences of poverty in poor places and, more particularly, places of concentrated poverty within the city. Indeed, the 'inner-city', 'ghetto', 'slum' and '*banlieue*' have emerged as powerful spatial metaphors within poverty debates, helping to shape dominant socio-spatial understandings of poverty (Wacquant 1993). In some ways, the rationale for this focus on urban places of concentrated poverty is obvious, as it is within these spaces that the sites and sights of poverty are most visible – in terms of the significant presence of poor people and welfare agencies, and the nature of the local built environment. It can also be suggested that these places make for particularly efficient modes of study (as well as journalism and policy intervention), providing researchers with neat, statistically defined geographical case studies of poverty.

This concern with concentrated forms of urban poverty, though, provides a rather imbalanced perspective on the geographies of poverty. Research tends to emphasise the problematic physical and social dimensions of these places, which aids the reproduction of 'inner-city stigmas, prejudices, fears and fantasies of mainstream society…' (Baeten 2004, 236). It also runs the risk of reducing poverty debates to discussions of the failings of disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods, whereby 'the social pathology of inner-city

ghettos is largely [viewed as] the result of the spatial concentration of poverty' (Crump 2002, 581). More serious, this focus on urban places of concentrated poverty diverts attention away from the broader range of relations between poverty and place. As was noted in the previous section, poverty has a significant presence in different types of place – the more socially mixed parts of the city, towns and rural places – and welfare geographers need to take more seriously the forms and experiences of poverty that exist within these places.

Anderson (2002) suggests that disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods need to be understood less as 'pockets of poverty' and more as 'places where self-perpetuating negative social, economic and physical processes occur that make them increasingly different from the rest of the city' (p. 153; see also Gough et al. 2006; Madanipour 1998). These so-called 'neighbourhood effects' are viewed as accentuating the misery of poverty, leading to claims that living in poverty in poor places is more challenging than elsewhere (Atkinson and Kintree 2001; Friedrichs et al. 2003). Particular attention has been given to the ways in which multiple forms of disadvantage in these places – relating to joblessness, declining levels of service provision and difficult social contexts – produce a downward spiral of decline (Lupton 2005; Lupton and Power 2003; McCormick and Philo 1995). It has been the last of these forms of disadvantage that has most occupied poverty researchers. Not only are poor places shown to be characterised by relatively insular social networks (Warren et al. 2001) but it is claimed that living in such places 'has been observed to corrode trust between neighbours, engender social isolation and limit opportunities for interaction with other communities' (Warr 2005, 285). In addition, Wacquant (1993) suggests that there is often a 'powerful stigma attached to residence in the[se] bounded and segregated spaces' (p. 369; see also Russell 1999), which both undermines residents' senses of identity and well-being, and (re-) produces negative external constructions of these spaces.

The work of Wilson (1987, 1996) on the ghettoisation of poverty in American cities has played an important part in spatialising understandings of poverty. Wilson argues that structural processes – including job losses, racial discrimination and the operation of housing allocation systems – have combined with social processes, particularly the out-migration of middle-class groups, to produce new spaces of social isolation and a downward spiral of decline in the inner-city. More recently, he suggests that life in the urban ghetto has been further destabilised by the 'disappearance of work', which has created new sets of cultural norms of worklessness. Wacquant's (2008) research inside the black ghetto in the USA and the working-class *Banlieue* in France has also been influential in debates on urban poverty. However, while his work identifies similar exclusionary processes at play to those noted by Wilson, Wacquant attaches more significance to the actions of the state in producing marginality within the city:

> It is *the collapse of the public institutions*, resulting from state policies of urban abandonment and leading to punitive containment of the black (sub-) proletariat, that emerges as the most potent and most distinctive cause of entrenched marginality in the American metropolis. (Wacquant 2008, p. 3–4)

These and other ethnographic studies of urban poverty have helped to challenge dominant narratives of 'concentrated poverty'. Wilson's work, for example, indicates that 'patterns of behaviour in the inner city often represent particular cultural adaptations to the systematic blockage of opportunities in the environment of the inner city and the society as a whole' (Wilson 2003; 1109). Poor places have also been shown to be associated with a great deal of social heterogeneity and a mix of poverty groupings – including those in low-paid work, migrants, welfare recipients and homeless people – with these

different mixes shaping experiences of poverty in particular places (Sessoms and Wolch 2008). Others have questioned dominant constructions of the disadvantaged inner-city neighbourhood as a socially dysfunctional space, arguing that while such places may represent the spatial embodiment of poverty and social exclusion, they also function as a '*space[s] of inclusion* for those social groups that are not accepted by mainstream society' (Baeten 2004, 240; see also Amin 2005; Bauder 2002; Forrest and Kearns 2001; Katz 1993; Wacquant 1993, 2008).

A rather different perspective on the poverties of place emerges from recent research in rural communities. Here, it is the various invisibilities of poverty – the dispersal of poor people across the rural landscape, their presence within more socially mixed communities and the absence of key welfare services – that are important in shaping its dominant constructions and experiences (see Milbourne 2004a; Tickamyer 2006). These physical and social invisibilities not only lead to political, media and lay denials of poverty in rural places but produce more challenging contexts for those experiencing (and researching) this poverty. The in-migration of urban middle-class groups create additional problems for those on low incomes as they impose their 'idyllised' constructions of rural living on to these places through the capture of local housing markets and community resources (see Blank 2004; Duncan 1999; Milbourne 2004b). Moreover, research in the USA and the UK highlights how strong moral discourses of rurality continue to influence everyday experiences of rural poverty. For example, Sherman (2006) argues that the range of coping strategies available in rural places is more restricted than in urban contexts and more heavily influenced by 'local cultural and gender norms, which dictate a preference for informal work and self-proficiency' (p. 892). In addition, as these coping strategies are more visible in smaller and more close-knit rural places, it is suggested that they play a more significant role in determining people's status within rural communities.

4 Welfare Geographies

A key concern of the 'new' welfare geography that emerged in the 1970s was the spatial unevenness of welfare provision, and the geographical mismatch between welfare needs and provision (see Knox 1975; Smith 1977). Although these uneven geographies of welfare continued to occupy geographers in the 1980s and 1990s (see Curtis 1989; Pinch 1997), Hamnett (2009) has recently suggested that welfare policy and associated spending patterns have become rather neglected themes within welfare geography. Hamnett draws on Mohan's (1999) 'spatial divisions of welfare' analytical framework to call for new studies of 'geographical differences in the overall structure, funding and organization of welfare provision, the extent to which it is publicly or privately provided, and the history and politics of such provision' (p. 3). Others have been critical of previous geographical accounts of welfare. Powell and Boyne (2001), for example, claim that welfare geographers have largely neglected the actions of the (national and local) state and the specific contexts of individual places in shaping the geographies of welfare provision. In particular they suggest that welfare geography needs to move beyond simplistic statements about the undesirability of spatial inequalities in welfare spending to provide more sophisticated understandings of the political and policy rationales for and welfare implications of such inequalities.

During the last couple of decades, most geographical work on welfare has focused on the shifting relations between the central and local welfare states. It is now widely recognised that welfare systems in different countries have long been associated with complex scalar interactions and geographical specificities. The prototype local systems of welfare

provision that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example, were characterised by a great deal of spatial unevenness, dependent as they were on the presence of and pressures exerted by different political groups in particular (and largely urban) places (see Cochrane 2004). The rolling out of key features of these local schemes to establish national systems of welfare in the middle years of the twentieth century was, in part, intended to eliminate much of this spatial unevenness. In practice, this process of nationalisation merely introduced new sets of scalar interactions between central and local welfare actors (Digby 2006) and new types of spatial unevenness in relation to welfare provision.

It is claimed that recent rounds of welfare reform have produced ever more complex collisions between national and local actors, and increased the spatial unevenness of welfare provision. National welfare systems have been radically overhauled, with the reduction or removal of various tiers of support and the introduction of non-state agencies as providers or deliverers of welfare assistance (see Cochrane et al. 2001; Lund 2002; Rodger 2000). Welfare restructuring has also devolved a range of welfare responsibilities to local agencies. In combination, these processes have complicated the geographies of welfare as welfare provision in particular places has become ever more dependent on the presence of different mixes of public, private and third sector welfare agencies (DeVerteuil et al. 2002).

For Schram et al. (2008), the evolving system of welfare governance is both 'more muscular in its normative enforcement and diffuse and diverse in its organisation' (p. 70), allowing for increased flexibility for local agencies but also new sets of centrally imposed constraints, particularly in relation to financial resources (see also Miewald 2001). Indeed, it would appear that the (central) state has emerged as a more powerful player within the welfare system as new welfare arrangements remain within the 'shadow of hierarchies' (Jessop 1994). For example, recent work on the devolution of welfare responsibilities to the voluntary sector has shown that this has been associated with additional state control of the sector's activities, which has led to changed modes of operations and the channelling of voluntary sector activities into those spaces favoured by the state (Cloke et al. 2001; Fyfe and Milligan 2003; May et al. 2005; Merrett 2001).

More recently, geographers have explored the spatial underpinnings and impacts of an emerging workfare regime. Viewed as part of the transition from 'roll back' to 'roll out' neoliberalism, workfare represents an important shift from 'the welfarist principles of needs-based entitlement and universality to the workfarist principles of compulsion, selectivity, and active labour-market inclusion' (Peck 2001a; 493; see also Peck 2001b). Most geographical work on workfare has taken place in the USA where the focus has been on the spatial implications of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). With its reductions in welfare spending, limits on entitlements to welfare support, non-work sanctions and devolution of welfare responsibilities, PRWORA has been constructed as the epitome of the neoliberal workfare regime. Although its implementation produced some dramatic early reductions in welfare caseloads, it is claimed that this workfare system has created new forms of vulnerability amongst the unemployed and increased levels of work-based insecurity for ex-welfare recipients who have been moved into low status employment (Daguerre 2008). It would also appear that workfare has produced an 'increasingly uneven landscape of welfare resulting from the interaction of state economic change and state-to-state variations in welfare program design' (Wolch and Dinh 2001, p. 485).

Workfare has provided states with increased flexibility to develop bespoke welfare initiatives to deal with local economic and welfare circumstances. Although this local flexibility has permitted the implementation of progressive local programmes of welfare

that are able to counter some of the constraints imposed by the national workfare regime (see DeVerteuil et al. 2002), budgetary restrictions have meant that many states and counties are 'either unable or unwilling to allocate additional resources to fill gaps left by federal program reductions' (Wolch and Dinh 2001, 488). In addition, decentralisation has allowed the construction of more punitive local welfare regimes, with studies of individual states indicating that the new workfare system is being used to penalise the poor and reinforce existing prejudices concerning race and place (Nissen 1999; Peck 2001a; Schram et al. 2008).

It is claimed that workfare is underpinned by a spatialised discourse of welfare. According to Cope and Gilbert (2001) 'the language and provisions of PRWORA have imminent urban biases, and the early (most influential) demonstration projects have been overwhelmingly urban' (p. 386). Indeed, recent work has pointed to the differential impacts of workfare in rural places as the limitations of the local economy in (remoter) rural places complicates the transition form welfare to work (Pickering et al. 2006; Weber et al. 2002). Furthermore, welfare devolution in some rural places may be prone to subversion by local elites who have traditionally been unsympathetic to anti-poverty agendas (Duncan 1999).

The continued dominance of social inclusionary discourses of welfare in many European countries has meant that the workfare agenda has been much less developed than in the USA. The exception has been the UK, where key elements of workfare have been imported by successive Labour governments since the late 1990s. Although there has been relatively little geographical research undertaken on the emerging British workfare system, it is claimed that it has introduced new spatial complexities and has itself been complicated by geography (Lister 1999). For example, Sunley et al.'s (2006) recent analysis of the UK government's New Deal for Young People programme demonstrates that local labour market conditions have influenced the implementation and impacts of this programme, leading them to conclude that the 'consideration of place is indispensable for assessing whether workfare works' (p. 207) (see also Cochrane and Etherington 2007; Milbourne 2010).

Finally, alongside these geographical accounts of welfare reform, attention has been given to the welfare impacts of neo-liberal political projects initiated in particular cities. Bound up with urban entrepreneurialism, the makeover of inner-city spaces and improvements to the aesthetics of place (MacLeod 2002), it is argued that these localised projects of neoliberalism 'collide with pre-existing socio-spatial cleavages and, in turn, create new forms of inequality, political disenfranchisement, and economic immiseration' (Brenner and Theodore 2002, 345). Work has explored the ways that prime and public spaces within the central city have been re-designed, privatised and re-regulated in an effort to displace the poor and homeless, whose presence within these spaces is deemed to threaten the neo-liberal urban agenda (see Davis 1990; MacLeod 2002; Mitchell 2003; Smith 1996). This project of urban cleansing has particularly targetted street homeless people through 'an *escalation* of punitive measures…with more aggressive interventions that apparently relegate homeless people to an inexorably collapsing set of (public) spaces…' (DeVerteuil et al. 2009, 3).

5 Conclusions: Towards Broader Geographies of Poverty and Welfare

The last decade or so has witnessed an impressive growth of geographical work on poverty and welfare linked to a resurgence of interest in 'the social' within human geography, spatial turns within welfare studies and the changing 'real-world' landscapes of poverty and welfare. Recent publications on these themes have certainly provided more sophisticated accounts of the geographies of poverty and welfare, particularly the spatial

dynamics of poverty, the complexities of poverty in place and the shifting scalar politics of welfare reform. Although recognising these achievements, it is apparent that there remain imbalances and gaps within existing geographical literatures on these themes. In this final section of the paper I want to discuss four themes that I consider warrant further attention by welfare geographers.

The first and perhaps most obvious theme relates to the spaces within which welfare geographers choose (not) to work. It is clear that geographical studies of poverty continue to privilege concentrated forms of poverty within the spaces of the (inner) city over the equally, and arguably more, significant poverties associated with other urban, sub-urban and rural places. Welfare geographers need to move beyond these rather narrow concerns with *places of poverty* to engage with the broader *poverties of place*. This shift will require new explorations of the different mixes of poverty present in different places, as well as the ways in which the political, economic, socio-cultural and environmental configurations of place influence the form and experience of poverty in particular spatial contexts; it will demand more comparative studies of poverty in different places as well as further in-depth study of poverty in places beyond the inner-city; and it will present new methodological challenges for (urban) poverty researchers, not least because the types of poverty associated with these other places remain largely hidden within the physical, social and cultural landscape.

Geographical accounts of poverty and welfare tend also to be polarised in terms of their scales of enquiry and methodological approaches. In the one camp sit spatial analyses of income statistics, which are generally pitched at the national level; in the other are qualitative studies of poverty in particular places. Rarely are connections made between these different scales and modes of enquiry. However, as Kodras (1997) argues, making sense of the geographies of poverty requires the fusing of national and local processes given that 'inequalities originating in global capitalist production, national political systems, and societal conventions of patriarchy and discrimination are differentially refracted into specific local contexts, creating dramatically different geographic variations in life chances for different people' (p. 69). The multi-dimensional nature of poverty also demands more sophisticated modes of research if geographers are to capture the structural underpinnings, statistical significance and diversity of experience of poverty across different spatial contexts. Statistical forms of spatial analysis may provide the context for in-depth studies of poverty in particular places, whereas place-based research in 'poor' places may challenge dominant statistically-derived narratives of these places (see Sessoms and Wolch 2008).

Third, geographers may need to be more careful with their categorisations of poverty, poor people and poor places. Although Vasilachis de Gialdino's (2006) critique of dominant classifications of poverty will certainly unsettle some of the conventional labellings and methodological strategies utilised by geographers in their studies of poverty, it nevertheless provides opportunities for the construction of new narratives that better reflect the situations of people in poverty. Extending her critique to spatial categorisations of poverty, it can be argued that recent geographical work has tended both to emphasise the differences between 'poor' and 'non-poor' places and to downplay the presence of social diversity within the former places. It would be useful to look more critically at some of the commonalities and inter-relations between 'poor' and 'non-poor' places (see Amin 2005) as well as to explore in greater depth the diversity of lived experiences associated with and forms of informal support provided by 'poor' places.

Finally, more work may be required to demonstrate the relevance of welfare geography to wider audiences. Although social geographers may have become more

interested in welfare during the last few years, it is difficult to claim that there has been any 'welfare turn' within human geography, but this is exactly what is required if geographers are to do justice to the cultural, political, economic and social dimensions of poverty and welfare. It is also the case that, even with the spatialities of poverty having begun to be addressed more seriously by social policy researchers, geography still occupies a rather marginal position within welfare studies and more effort is needed to export welfare geographies to other parts of the social sciences. Beyond the academy, geography and geographers remain rather peripheral players in political, policy and media debates on poverty and welfare, with geographical perspectives either absent altogether or reduced to simplistic descriptions of regional variation in poverty levels or problems of the inner-city neighbourhood. Although recognising the important differences between public and policy geographies (Martin 2001; Massey 2001; Ward 2006), and respecting those welfare geographers who choose not engage with these broader realms, there is clearly much more work required to infuse societal debates about poverty and welfare with more sophisticated geographical understandings.

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Short Biography

Paul Milbourne is Professor of Human Geography in the School of City and Regional Planning at Cardiff University. He has longstanding research interests in the geographies of poverty and welfare, particularly as they relate to rural places. More recently, he has become interested in the environments of poor places and is currently undertaking research on community gardening in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods in the UK. Paul has published widely on these themes, including the following recent books: *Rural Poverty: Marginalization and Exclusion in Britain and the United States* (2004, Routledge); *International Perspectives on Rural Homelessness* (2006, Routledge, with Paul Cloke) and *International Perspectives on Rural Welfare* (2010, Emerald).

Note

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