

“Under Heavy Manners?” Social Work, Radicalisation, Troubled Families and Non-linear War

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Abstract:

The “war on terror” signalled a new type of warfare, one that accorded with the features of what Surkov argues is non-linear war Pomerantsev (2014). Traditional war, that takes place in a particular geographical location, with an identifiable enemy, is no more. Instead, warfare is a more fluid phenomenon. The paper argues that Surkov’s concept can be usefully applied to current developments in social work practice in the UK. We trace the origins of key anti-terrorist policy developments in the UK (PREVENT and CHANNEL) from the war on terror and argue that such policies have serious implications for social work. We argue that there is an increasing securitisation approach in addressing modern social problems. We describe these as reflecting conflationary rhetorical logic, notably, the linking of Troubled Families programmes with “terror”. The paper concludes that social workers, need to firstly recognise tactics at play in the state of non-linear war, secondly, become critically aware of conflationary rhetorical turns in political discourse, third: actively resist securitised discourses and lastly, reject discriminatory notions of so called dangerous people and communities. In other words, we should actively re-engage with and promote social work values and social justice.

Keywords:

Non-linear war, neo liberalism, terrorism, radicalisation, social work, PREVENT, Troubled Families

Introduction:

Unusually, we start with a musical reference, which helped us in the early stages of writing this article, to conceptualise our growing unease with the direction of social work in the UK and current policy directives that we felt were increasingly restrictive. When *Prince Far I* released the controversial reggae album 'Under Heavy Manners' in 1976, he was anticipating a new form of state

oppression. A favourite with the *Clash*, the title track evokes the deepest, darkest and most apocalyptic groove on the album in satirising the Jamaican government's obsession with discipline and control. We are thus raising at the outset, a concern that social work and social work users in the UK, are currently under “Heavy Manners” and wish to explore this further.

The discussion explores the idea of “the non-linear war” attributed to Surkov a Russian politician (Pomerantsev, 2014), and makes an argument for its relevance to contemporary UK social work. Non linear war is a deliberate use of information and disinformation to confuse and manipulate populations. Its intention is to allow hegemonic power to remain unchecked and supports the development of neo liberal and neo conservative policy turns (Curtis, 2014). We will argue that global foreign and domestic policies are examples of a wider project by the government to shift social work in the UK towards a neo-liberal paradigm, at odds with traditional social work values and its broad, social science base. We make our case through the examination of global foreign policy developments and a number of key British social policies, namely, PREVENT, CHANNEL and the Troubled Families scheme. We also make connections to current developments in social work education in England.

The paper begins by exploring the idea of non-linear war before locating current policy developments in the UK in terms of wider global and ideological developments surrounding the war on terror, which, we argue, is a key moment in the development of non-linear war. We then go on to consider how the concept of non-linear war is relevant to social work in the UK (and in other neo liberal countries); through case examples of key British social policy developments, that, as we go on to argue, has profound implications for social work. We conclude that social work in the UK is subject to an ideological strategy very similar to Surkov's concept of non-linear war, which attempts to use a rhetorical language of terror, confusion, fear and uncertainty, to re-imagine social work within hardening neo-liberal and securitised paradigms.

Non-linear War

The British documentary maker and social commentator Adam Curtis credits the Russian politician Vladislav Surkov with the development of a contemporary concept of non linear war and applying it to existing political narratives (Curtis, 2014). Surkov’s aim was to create confusion and uncertainty in the minds of the electorate. One of the methods he used was to sponsor a variety of groups, some of whom inhabited entirely opposing ideological positions, to ensure the electorate are unable to

conceptualise a clear sense of the world (Pomerantsev, 2014). The constant state of confusion that governments create do not allow people space to arrive at carefully considered conclusions, rather the frenetic environment fosters a sense of confusion, uncertainty and fear and in the vacuum created, those in power maintain their position through controlling the uncertainty (Curtis, 2014).

In an experimental essay, set in the future after an apocalyptic war entitled “Without Sky”, Surkov (writing under the name Natan Dobovitsky), developed this concept further (Dobovitsky, 2014). Non-linear war, is a new form of war, one which is not fixed in location or time and has no clearly defined enemy or morally definable reason. The war exists in an exponentially flexible series of dimensions, which destabilise perceptions and leave observers in a constant state of confusion, threat and uncertainty, thereby allowing the state to implement increasingly restrictive forms of management and control over the populace.

As we go on to document, the global “war on terror” provoked uncertainty and anxiety, and provided a vacuum for non-linear war practices to flourish. In this atmosphere, we maintain that neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideological narratives thrive, gain wider uncritical acceptance, which then infiltrate social policy developments. Indeed, as Sontag (2001) argues, such military metaphors abound in capitalist societies, because of the need to diminish ethical principles and practice and to promote instead, self-interest and profitability. We will demonstrate in this paper that such policy developments, impact both directly, as well as in a surreptitious and furtive way on the very nature of social work practice as well as impacting adversely on the users of social work services. Such narratives, as we will see, are simplistic in analysis, and discursively posed as a struggle between good and evil. Our concern is that such simplistic narratives result in political and explanatory discourses that Tyler (2014) describes as “thin”. We also note the continuing government attack on the academy in the UK, particularly on the social sciences (Tyler, 2014). This is of a particular concern for social work education and as we discuss later – we can see this “uncoupling” of social sciences in recent social work training schemes. We now return to the global context, which contextualises later debates and policy developments in both the UK, and internationally.

The Global Context:

In the aftermath of the terror attacks in New York in 2001, Bush declared America and her allies at war on terror. Bush worked closely with the British Prime Minister at the time, Tony Blair, in a spirit of cooperation that was known as a “special relationship”. Indeed, Blair remarked:

“I don’t think there is any doubt at all that this threat is aimed at the whole demographic world, the US has been singled out...But these terrorists will regard us all as targets”. (BBC, date unknown)

Britain was a willing partner in the war and directly allied itself with Bush, who remarked that this was a new war, unlike like no other, and one that had no fixed enemy, no definable theatre and no clear victories or end points in sight (CNN, 2001). As Bush stated in an address to a joint session of Congress on 20th. September 2001:

“Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.” (Bush, 2001)

The war on terror was global with a particular emphasis on countries (such as Iraq and Afghanistan at that time) that Bush held as being supportive of moral and religious doctrines shared by the enemy. The surreal nature of a war without clear boundaries and a geographical location; with enemies whose whereabouts are both known and unknown (which has direct resonance with Surkhov’s concept). This was additionally complicated by lack of clarity about how far various forms of intervention, (military or political), were officially declared. For example, the killing of Osama Bin Laden, where American troops entered Pakistan without its government’s knowledge or approval (International Business Times, 2015). What was striking, was military intervention occurring without recourse to the populace and thus was, and in our view remains, a barrier for the populace to understand and conceptualise the exact nature of the conflict. A particular concern to us, is that this state of affairs mitigates against a thorough examination of the contributory factors to the conflict, and in this fearful vacuum where our enemies are possibly on our own soil, foreign policy takes a particular shape.

In his address to the American nation immediately after the 9/11 attack Bush expressed a sense of moral indignation and outrage at the attacks on America, and emphasised a need for an immediate and muscular response, which reasserted America’s global power. The decision to engage in this undertaking happened post haste. America declared war on terror on September 20th 2001; many were still reeling from the impact, and arguably, before enough time had elapsed for the public to

countenance the scale and ferocity of the attack. In declaring his war on terror Bush confirmed that America and her global allies were at non linear war, a war had no clear beginning or end point, no definite enemy, and no fixed locations. Rather this was a war waged against an enemy that did not share Western liberal values of democracy and freedom. In the address on 20th September 2001, Bush stated;

“Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen. It may include dramatic strikes, visible on TV, and covert operations, secret even in success. We will starve terrorists of funding, turn them one against another, drive them from place to place, until there is no refuge or no rest. And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.” (Bush, 2001)

As it can be seen, the reference to covert operations, secrecy and the threat posed by terrorists is striking and powerfully represents the notion of a non-linear war. It is interesting to note that in declaring the war on terror, Bush did not identify a timescale for its duration; rather he indicated that it would be a “long war”, one which continues to this day. We also note the dichotomous positioning in Bush’s speech, namely, you are with us, or against us. As we go on to explore, we now see this positioning in UK both counter terrorism and social policy more generally.

PREVENT

In the wake of the war on terror, and in response to attacks on the British mainland, for example the July 7th bombings in London and the Glasgow airport attack in 2007, the British government first produced a policy document in 2003, referred to as CONTEST (Home Office, 2011), which was its counter terrorism policy. Out of this general policy strategy, the British government developed a series of policies aimed at preventing vulnerable people from being “drawn into terrorism”. The PREVENT strategy thus aimed to identify those at risk of extremism and radicalisation. PREVENT describes extremism as:

“vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs.” (H.M. Govt. 2014)

PREVENT's stated aim is to work with people at risk of being radicalised, the definition of radicalisation, being the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and forms of extremism leading to terrorism, either committing terrorist acts abroad or on home ground. PREVENT aims at both identifying such individuals and working to divert people away from extremism, radicalisation and terrorism through a range of interventions. At the time of writing for example, there has been continuing concerns about young people going to Syria to join Isis, either as Isis brides or as soldiers (Withnall, 2015). Indeed, the narrative has been of young vulnerable people, being subjected to online grooming by radicalisers. A recent speech by Cameron, made explicit links to internet radicalisation, young people and use of the internet, which he claimed, was a key path to radicalisation and terrorism (The New Statesman, 2015).

Channel (another strand of the PREVENT policy) uses existing collaboration between local authorities, statutory partners (such as the education and health sectors, social services, children's and youth services and offender management services), the police and the local community to:

- identify individuals at risk of being drawn into terrorism
- assess the nature and extent of that risk
- develop the most appropriate support plan for the individuals concerned

Channel's stated aim is to safeguard children and adults from being drawn into committing terrorist-related activity by intervening early to divert people away from the risk they face before illegality occurs. The policy encouraged local authorities to develop partnerships to deliver such prevention interventions and more ominously, aim to "safeguard" those at "risk" of being targeted by terrorists and radicalisers" (H.M. Govt, 2014). Here we see the direct relevance to social work policy and practice, not least a re-orientation of "safeguarding", Indeed, James Brokenshire, then a British Government Minister for security, developed further the notion of "safeguarding" in terms of the war on terror:

"In the UK, safeguarding is the term we use when we talk about measures intended to keep individuals safe and protected from harm. This has particular relevance when encouraging frontline professionals to adopt strategies alongside other preventative initiatives aimed at protecting people from harms such as drugs, gang culture and gun and knife crime. And a testament to this approach is that to date we have trained thousands of

front line workers to recognise vulnerability to radicalisation in sectors such as health and education". (H.M. Gov. 2013)

It is interesting to note the use of the term "safeguarding" as this has traditionally been the domain of social workers and as will be explored later on in this paper, taken together PREVENT, CHANNEL, and conflation with the trouble families agenda, present a concerning challenge for social work. Such policies allow the state increased (and increasingly restrictive) involvement in communities and families seen to be at risk of radicalisation and/or troubled. The violence and destruction associated with terrorism is now inextricably aligned with "safeguarding", and the state actors involved in the prevention of terrorism now include teachers, social workers, nurses and librarians. Indeed, at the time of writing, The Counter Terrorism and Security Act (2015) came into force, requiring a number of specified agencies, including schools, colleges, prisons, local authorities and higher education establishments to promote "British values" and report concerns about people at risk of radicalisation.

For social work, the "problem" of terrorism is however located in communities, who are often discriminated against due to racism and Islamophobia, and who are at the sharp end of economic damage wrought by neo liberalism. This development requires careful consideration as it serves to increase the most restrictive apparatus of the state and allows it to be deployed into an increasing number of families and communities. We argue that existing adult and child protection legislation becomes eroded and existing state powers to safeguard vulnerable members of our communities through the provision of services which consider both need and deed are subsequently reduced by this restrictive approach. We should add at this point, we are not hostile to the idea of young people needing to be protected from attempts by radicalisers to incite participation in a war abroad, engage in terrorist acts, or become Jihadi brides, but it needs to be seen within traditional social work parameters that emphasise a thorough examination of the internal and external factors in the lives of the individual, their families and their community. We are really concerned that locating the issue purely within individuals is reductive, and fosters a culture of individual responsibility that could increase rather than decrease the possibilities for radicalisation. We are alarmed that the state is able to restrict the movement of particular sections of the population that it sees through a "securitised lens" while at the same time restricting the traditional reach of a liberal minded social work profession. We are deeply uneasy that that this may result in a perfect storm of classic non linear war; a problem population is restricted, and a so called problem and failing profession (Finch and Schaub, 2015), experiences an erosion of its traditional value base, while the securitised apparatus of the state is allowed greater prominence in the name of "national security". This is not

a hypothetical debate as contemporary social work practice issues are given a thorough examination by Stanley and Guru (2015) who proceed to detail the current practice gap in this growing area of social work activity. The concern is not only about young people possibly becoming radicalised but also the “threat” posed by coming from a family whereby parents may be subject to control orders, have been convicted of various terrorism activities, or where there are concerns about families ideological positioning, i.e. Islamic Fundamentalist, which counteract what is often referred to as “British Values” (Stanley and Guru, 2015). It was interesting to note the recent court judgement made by Sir James Moby, who made it clear that parents’ political and ideological beliefs do not on their own, constitute significant harm, in the case of a local authority who pursued a pre-birth care order against a Father who supported the English Defence League, a far right organisation (Moby, 2015). This is usefully juxtaposed against a strong statement by the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, who argues that children should be removed from homes where parents hold fundamentalist (i.e. Islamic) views, and should be considered child abuse (Johnson, 2014); and a further court case, where a sixteen year old young person was considered suffering from significant emotional abuse because of the family exposing her to ISIS propaganda (Austin, 2015).

But as Stanley and Guru (2015) argue, such anti-radicalisation work poses threats to social work values, which may promote working with families in ways that could breach fundamental human rights. We suspect that there a dangerous vacuum; with an accompanying lack of practice guidance in how social workers should work with families where radicalism is a possibility, alongside a government hostile to traditional forms of emancipatory work practice. Stanley and Guru (2015) thus caution social work practitioners to avoid being caught up in a moral panic and resist becoming “the guardians of radicalisation work” (2015:1). We go further, arguing that that this securitised incursion into social work is deliberate and seeks to undermine social works’ fundamental values, professional identity and autonomy.

Wider criticism of PREVENT and Channel has been significant, with its targeting of the Muslim population in particular areas (Kundani 2014), to raising an unfounded level of suspicion centred on the Muslim population (Awan 2012) and its lack of recognition of the complexities of applying a generalised notion of “community to a diverse and evolving environment” (Spalek 2013:). Coppock and McGovern (2015) argue that the “interventions” themselves are based on positivist psychological models that essentially focus on individuals at risk, rather than considering the wider social-economic and political context. More concerning, Muslim children and young people’s

innocent developing thoughts and perspectives of the world, run the risk of being reconstructed within securitised adult and neo-liberal discourses. Within this there is a possibility of Social Work failing to recognise the importance of the traditional developmental adolescent milestones; it is not uncommon for many young people to explore extremist attitudes and values at this stage in their life span and so used in its restrictive format PREVENT can be seen as an attempt to stymie this particular area of development, seeing it as a threat as opposed to a natural aspect of the development of adult characteristics. As Kundani (2014) asserts;

“What is needed is less state surveillance and enforced conformity and more critical thinking and political empowerment. The role of the communities in countering terrorism is not to institute self-censorship but to confidently construct political spaces where young people can politicize their disaffection into visions of how the world might be better organised” (2014: 289)

Further, as Pantazias and Pemberton (2009) argue, such policies serve instead to undermine, not enhance, national security. Similarly the refusal to consider the economic, social and political contexts in relation to the PREVENT agenda had drawn criticism. For many Muslim’s, PREVENT has been seen as a cynical way of giving police and the security services an opportunity to infiltrate Muslim communities with a view to gathering information on particular members who express so called anti Western views (Thomas, 2010). Further in conflating national security policy and criminal law, PREVENT can be seen as undermining fundamental tenets of the justice system allowing the notion of “pre-crime” to emerge, justifying an incursion into the private life of the populace, using the possibility of crime as a reason (McCulloch and Pickering, 2009). We therefore see additional policies introduced, such as control orders, which severely restricts the liberty and human rights of people suspected of being involved in radicalism, but not convicted of any crime.

There is also a linked problematic issue about difficulties in the development of a counter narrative. Indeed “Islamic fundamentalism” is now seen as the greatest threat to Western liberal democracies (Pantazias and Pemberton, 2009) and arguing against policies that seek to preserve the fabric of British society runs the potential risk of being seen as an extremist or a sympathiser with extremism. (The New Statesman, 2011). Indeed, we can see strongly Surkhov’s thesis that in a state of anxiety confusion and fear of the “other”, increasingly restrictive policies can flourish. We now go on to discuss, on the surface, a seemingly unconnected policy, but as we will argue, an ideologically connected policy, the Troubled Families Scheme.

Troubled Families Scheme

The troubled families scheme, introduced in 2012, aimed at identifying families with multiple issues. Indeed, 120,000 such families were initially identified by Louise Casey, in a report which explored the situation of just sixteen families with multiple problems (DCLG, 2012a). From this highly criticised report, not least on ethical research grounds (Bailey, 2012); so called “troubled families” were to be identified in each local authority on the following criteria, as laid out in a Department for Communities and Local Government report (2012):

- No adult in the family working
- Children not in school
- Family members involved in crime and anti-social behaviour.

Additionally such families would also be impacted by:

- Domestic violence
- Relationship breakdown
- Mental ill health
- Social isolation

Significant concerns have been raised by researchers as to the efficacy and desirability of such a scheme and indeed, the very notion that there exists “troubled families” who need to be “turned around”. The language used in implementing the scheme, appeared at odds with traditional social work values, and the approach appeared to be working “on” troubled families rather than “with” families in a more empowering manner, with an accompanying move from social work to family work (Crossley, 2014). Levitas (2012) has argued that the initial figure of 120,000 “troubled families” was not based on a sound methodology and Williams (2013) argues that the criteria used was based on deprivation indicators rather than behaviour. Levitas (2012) argues further that there has been a noteworthy discursive shift – one that conflates families experiencing disadvantage with families that cause “trouble”. Indeed, a speech by British Prime Minister, David Cameron, in 2011, explicitly evidences this;

“Officialdom might call them ‘families with multiple disadvantages’. Some in the press might call them ‘neighbours from hell’. Whatever you call them, we’ve known for years that a relatively small number of families are the source of a large proportion of the problems in society. Drug addiction.

Alcohol abuse. Crime. A culture of disruption and irresponsibility that cascades through generations. We've always known that these families cost an extraordinary amount of money.....but now we've come up the actual figures. Last year the state spent an estimated £9 million on just 120,000 families.....that is around £75,000 per family" (UK.Gov, 2011)

As Levitas (2014) comments, the veracity of these figures have been questioned as have evidence that the scheme is working. The willingness of local authorities to adopt the scheme, may have been based on the extra money that would accompany the work, as a key neo-liberal practice, payment by results, accompanies this scheme (DCLG, 2012b).

The “Conflationary turn” of “terror” with troubled families

We use the phrase “conflationary turn” as a linguistic device to capture what we feel is a particularly sinister and concerning practice employed by a neo liberal government to join together in the public mind, seemingly similar issues that are however, quite different and unique. The Security Minister, James Brokenshire, demonstrated this aptly;

“..in a similar vein, I am keen to ensure that the Government’s work to support troubled families is aligned to our work to support vulnerable individuals at risk of being drawn into terrorist activity” (Gov.uk, 2013).

Developing a link between terrorism and troubled families equates terrorist acts, , with families who are struggling with the structural disadvantages prevalent in today’s neo liberal society, and more worryingly, sees a solution to these issues via the securitised world of counter terrorist activity. One where, as discussed earlier, fundamental tenets of the justice system are undermined. Further, the conflation of terror with vulnerable families, who social work practitioners in the UK (and internationally) would view as structurally disadvantaged, oppressed and presenting with complex issues and concerns, signifies an ideological leap in the way we view users of social work services. Far from seeing vulnerable families as a product of inequality, such families are now seen through a “securitised lens”, and present a risk that is equated with murder, bombing and indiscriminate injury, indeed, Brokenshire argues;

“One particular interest of mine is the importance of ensuring that our counter radicalisation strategy sits alongside other key areas of public sector

work. I think it's important that we articulate our counter radicalisation strategy within the context of safeguarding". (Gov.UK, 2013)

This suggests that the government sees Troubled Families as having similar potential for violence and disruption as terrorists." Moreover it provides an interesting insight into the ideological position of the government. In both cases the responsibility for action is located within the family or the individual, there is no critique of the wider issues that could lead to families or individuals becoming "troubled" or "radicalised." The response in both cases emphasises the importance of surveillance of particular populations, with the police working closely with other public services to develop de-escalation approaches that are individualised and removed from a wider structural narrative. We can see how this ideological positioning is applied to troubled families (and other welfare recipients) ensuring that the public issues faced by individuals and families are socialised and pathologised into an individualised and personalised set of circumstances.

Both the Troubled Families programme and the PREVENT policy represent examples of a deliberate relocation of public services. We maintain that public service should have a focus on working with families and communities as opposed to a "targeting" approach which assigns responsibility to particular "problem" populations utilising "thin" social and political narratives. We also note an explicit linking of terrorism and the Trouble Families agenda, as some councils, for example Birmingham City Council in its Trouble Families Programme, has "*family member is believed to have been influenced by violent extremism*" (Birmingham City Council, date unknown) as a criteria. These ideological paradigms, pose fundamental dilemmas and tensions for social work, and we discuss the implications for social work in the next section.

Implications for Social Work

The development of the partnerships that PREVENT and CHANNEL and the troubled families project, demonstrates the British governments' fundamental misunderstanding of social work. Relational work requires high levels of trust and transparency and relationships need to be clear, boundaried, and carefully cultivated. The suggestion that social workers should infiltrate families in this way is a deliberate ideological attempt to remake social work and to diminish trust based relationships (Trevithick, 2003; Ruch, 2005; Koprowska, 2003). In this new incarnation, social work is fundamentally judgemental and exists as an agent of social control in terms of targeting service users with values, cultural practices or ideological beliefs that do not accord with Western neo-

liberal ones. The primary task, already contested over in social work, namely the care vs. control element becomes further obscured. What we see, is the increase in the marginalisation and oppression of Muslim youths, poor families, people without work and young Mothers. A “thin” public and political discourse emerges, which operationalises social problems in concrete and non ambiguous ways, proposing simple, often harsh, punitive solutions, in a political and ideological landscape that views state intervention (and those who are subject to state intervention) in a distinctly negative light.

As we argued earlier, neo-liberalism and its various ideological tenets, including the uncritical adoption of new public management practices, flourishes in a non-linear war environment. Whilst Surkov’s theory was identified initially as an explanatory framework for the current war on terror, the rules of engagement of such new forms of war and the undermining of civil liberties can be clearly identified in existing political narratives as they impact particular groups. We see this in terms of the pervasiveness of national counter terrorist strategies that seep into other social policy areas, hence our highlighting the serious implications of such discursive ideological turns and conflations, on the very heart of social work values and practices. Indeed, we can see further evidence of these conflations in the continued so called “reform” and reviews into social work education in the UK in the last decade or so, often prompted by Serious Case Reviews and Public Inquiries when a child dies at the hands of its parents.

The latest reports on the state of social work education by Narey and Croisdale-Appleby in 2014, added to the narrative about the so called “problem” of social work, namely, that traditional forms of social work education is failing to equip new social workers with the requisite skills to perform their roles. Alongside such reports, a Department of Education scheme to train so called “elite” Oxbridge graduates for work in children and families social work, in a fast track scheme called “Frontline”, similar to “Teach First”, was rolled out with the first cohort of 100 trainees beginning their training in September 2014. Like Teach First, the pedagogy of the programme is essentially immersion in practice, with employers taking the lead, with little, if any theoretical input. What we see here a deliberate attempt to uncouple the importance of a wide range of theory, found in traditional social work training in the UK, much of which challenges the status quo and “thin” neo liberal political discourse. Indeed, the CEO of the Frontline scheme, a former trainee of Teach First, has from the beginning of the announcement of the scheme, adopted a highly critical narrative to traditional forms of social work education, as well as those involved, including the quality of students (Brindle, 2013). Concerns about the scheme from academics and practitioners have been

met with hostility. Indeed, the CEO of Frontline, claims that criticism from academics is based solely on self serving motives;

“Frontline, if it works and is successful, is a threat to that market, At the centre of that criticism is a fear that the implication of this being successful is they’ve spent some of their career doing something which could have been put to bed easier.” (Kendall and Reed, 2015)

Indeed, even the social work friendly Guardian newspaper, referred to “venomous academics” in their concerns about Frontline (Webber, 2013). We see this as part and parcel of the non-linear war being waged on the academy and the public sector more generally. The question now arises over how the profession can resist such discourses and maintain its important values given the context. It seems clear, that working in securitised ways, is a dangerous path for social work to go down. Whilst there has always been a Marxist view that social workers are agents of the state (Mullaly, 1997), the current context, i.e. the pervasiveness of conflationary discursive turns, signals a new low. Newbury-Keroluk (2014), writing from a Canadian social work perspective, suggests that newly qualified social workers should resist military metaphors, of itself, informed by neo-conservative ideology. Indeed, the securitisation we discussed earlier, reveals itself all too readily in military metaphors that abound in current social work practice, namely, that social workers are soldiers, and social welfare is an “arena of war” (Newbury-Keroluk, 2014:53). Beckett (2003) also explored metaphors in social work discourse in the UK and also found military terms used, which in the context of this discussion, places service users in particular positions and roles, namely that of the enemy. It also resonates heavily with our theme of being under heavy manners. Newbury-Keroluk argues instead that social workers should view themselves, not as soldiers on the frontline dealing with a hostile enemy, but as:

“...facilitators of human growth and social well being...[as] vulnerable and idealistic partners...realising social work’s objectives.” (2014:52)

It is sad to note the new fast track training scheme discussed earlier, uses such a military metaphor, namely “Frontline”, and perhaps ironic that it shares its name with a well known brand of animal flea treatment.

So what can a profession under constant governmental and public attack do to counter such political narratives of the people we work with as “dangerous” and potential terrorists? We suggest a need to firstly; become conscious of the tactics at play in the state of non-linear war; secondly, become

critically aware of conflationary rhetorical turns in political discourse and policy narratives; thirdly, actively recognise and resist securitised discourses and practices and lastly, reject discriminatory notions of so called dangerous people and communities. It is recognised that this is of course, a challenge but if we do not assert ourselves or our values, then we run the risk of being shaped into neo-liberal actors in an increasing securitised state.

Concluding Comments

We began this paper with a musical reference, “Under Heavy Manners” by Prince Far-I, to describe an increasingly oppressive government regime and we suggested at the outset, that social work in the UK was currently under heavy manners, as are users of social services and other minority groups deemed to be “dangerous”. We maintain that the concept of non-linear war is highly relevant to current social work policy and practice, both in the UK and elsewhere. The conflation between policies aimed at identifying and working with people at risk from being radicalised with the Troubled Families agenda, is an example of how notions of domestic non-linear war are realised and perpetuated.

We would like to end this paper with a further musical reference. The impact of punk rock music on British society was one of the most significant cultural incidents of modern times, this particular music owed much to the articulation of the oppression and approbation experienced by reggae musicians and the ability of British and Northern Irish young people to recognize a shared experience of being marginalised. We argue that social workers should see similarities between the targeting, marginalization and oppression of young people and other minority groups, and the non-linear attacks on the fundamental tenets of the social work profession. We must therefore strongly resist neo-liberal conceptualizations of the people we work with, as threats or potential enemies of the state, and instead, engage in the politics of social work which focuses instead of structural inequality, oppression and discrimination.

Post Script

During the development and writing of this paper, the authors, one based on London and the other in Scotland, used “whatsapp”, an instant messaging service, as a digital “space” to explore our rather unformed and disconnected ideas. It was somewhat ironic (but also of great concern) therefore to note a recent Government proposal to ban such encrypted services, in its so called fight against

terrorism. This is precisely our general argument being laid out in this paper about the non-linear war and government using increasingly restrictive policies and practice.

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