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Introduction

Background

Throughout modernity society has been preoccupied with threats to personal safety and wellbeing. Following the Second World War of the last century, the British state introduced a range of redistributive measures founded on Keynesian welfarist principles which aimed to safeguard the safety and wellbeing of its citizens. Since the late-1970s, however, governments have pursued different ideological aims based on neo-liberalism which claims that it is no longer viable for the state to protect its citizens through redistributive measures (for to do so would erode the profits of enterprise and lead to investment flowing, at the click of a mouse, to more profitable locations). For the past 30 years, governments have increasingly focused on generating a 'stable' environment for the capitalist accumulation of surplus value through the creation of a flexible labour market (via wage constraints, curbs on trade union powers and work-based welfare schemes), cutting taxation and opening up public services to private investment. Increasingly, governments have sought to prioritise the needs of the economy and economic growth – claiming that this is the best means of promoting the wellbeing of the majority. A consequence of this change, however, has been a dramatic transformation in social relations in Britain – characterised by widening social inequalities, increasing community tensions and declining social wellbeing for many people.

At the same time, under the neo-liberal order, social problems have been increasingly redefined as problems of the individual rather than the social, with criminal justice solutions increasingly replacing welfare

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responses to these problems. A corollary of this has been a dramatic rise in the public's fear of crime, disorder, social conflict and danger. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, restoring community safety and cohesion, and addressing 'anti-social' behaviour, have become the major social policy priorities for government. Buoyed by realist theorists' acceptance of reactionary populist notions of 'crime' and 'disorder' (presented as 'commonsense' – that is, that the fear of 'youth crime' and generalised incivility are the most important social threats of our time and need to be dealt with severely), both Conservative and Labour administrations have competed with each other to appear to be the most authoritarian in their responses to these perceived threats.

Accompanying these developments has been the growing appeal of 'community' as both a site for and agency of policy intervention. Throughout the past few years, there have been notable expressions of institutional support for community involvement in various social and economic programmes. This change in focus is reflected in the current employment market, as evidenced in *Society Guardian* each Wednesday where community-related posts in various social policy areas can often be found advertised – in health and social care, housing, regeneration, criminal justice, youth work, economic development, and so forth. Community involvement has been a consistent theme in urban policy rhetoric since the 1980s. Under New Labour, there has been an increase in political interest in the notion of community involvement throughout a broader range of social policy areas – including crime and disorder prevention. This interest is likely to continue in the foreseeable future. In his first parliamentary speech as Prime Minister (delivered on 3 July 2007), Gordon Brown announced proposals for a new constitutional settlement which, he claimed, would change the balance of power between communities and the state in British society. These proposals included extending the rights of communities to be consulted on major policy decisions affecting their lives and 'to hold power more accountable…. The right of the British people to have their voice heard is fundamental to our democracy and to holding public institutions to account' (cited in BBC News 2007a). Brown's plans, set out in the Green Consultative Paper *The Governance of Britain*, have been described as a 'potentially dramatic extension of direct democracy' (Wintour 2007: 1). At the time of writing, a new White Paper, *Putting Communities in Control – Empowerment White Paper,* is awaited – previewed in the consultation document *Unlocking the Talents of Our Communities* which sets out the government's intentions to involve communities more actively in area regeneration, local democracy, the improvement of public

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services and local accountability (DfCLG 2008). For many, the readiness of Brown's government to prompt a public debate on the state of British democracy will have been welcomed. David Cameron, leader of the opposition, has also alluded on various occasions to the crucial role communities have to play in tackling social problems.

However, despite the enduring appeal of community, the idea of community itself is contestable and holds different meanings for different people. Ordinarily, the notion of community implies something that is bounded – either geographically (a place or neighbourhood where people live in close proximity) or socially (implying interaction between people holding shared interests or values) (Hillary 1955). In contemporary social policy debates we can identify a clear emphasis on defining communities as places of indigenous people holding shared values and customs (for instance, in relation to 'respectfulness' or 'being British'). This comes close to the communitarian notion of 'community as unity', harmonious and devoid of conflict – a notion which effectively establishes boundaries against the potentially 'dangerous other' who, by failing to conform, poses a threat to the established social order. As we will see at various junctures in this book, community has been used in this way by politicians and the media at various times in history (and particularly under New Labour's period in government) in order to enforce certain desired behaviour (e.g. on 'anti-social youth') or commitments (e.g. from the unemployed to engage in paid work or from foreign nationals to prove their allegiance to the British state). Such rhetorical use of community generates a highly moralising discourse that serves to legitimate both the maintenance of privilege for included insiders and authoritarian sanctions aimed at excluded outsiders unwilling or unable to fit in. Such usages of community in contemporary Britain have invariably served to differentiate between the 'right' type of community (conformist and loyal to 'British' values and middle-England notions of 'decency') and the 'wrong' type (which pose a risk to mainstream social and cultural values – for example, travellers, anti-globalisation protestors, Muslims 'with a grievance' or other black immigrants 'unwilling' to 'assimilate'). Despite the rhetoric of 'empowerment' that generally accompanies community-based policies, the top-down nature of mainstream community involvement approaches in British social policy would suggest that its attraction is, as Crow and Allan have argued, 'less about democratic self-determination and more about managing social tensions and assisting state bureaucracies to accomplish their objectives' (Crow and Allan 1994: 162).

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It is with regard to these general themes – dominant notions of social wellbeing, community safety and cohesion, and how these have shaped and are shaping social policy developments; and the contestable nature of community as a concept, and how it has been used by both the powerful (to maintain the existing distribution of privilege and social wellbeing in society) and the disadvantaged (to challenge the existing institutional arrangements for distributing privilege and social wellbeing) – that this book is concerned. In analysing these themes, the book aims to contribute to the contemporary debate on the efficacy of existing societal arrangements in British society for promoting greater social wellbeing, community safety and cohesion. The main argument presented is that enhanced social wellbeing, community safety and cohesion is unlikely to be advanced by a social system whose main objective is the preservation of economic competitiveness in the global market over other goals that include greater social solidarity and more participatory politics. Indeed, it will be argued that it is this very same social system that is the fundamental cause of the decline in wellbeing, the rise in insecurity and the breakdown in community cohesion it purports to heal. This assessment exposes the need to forge alternative institutional arrangements for determining the necessary societal preconditions for maximising social wellbeing, community safety and cohesion within wider society, and putting these into effect. Moreover, in considering the viability of realising such a social transformation, attention will be drawn to the emancipatory appeal of community as a site upon which to mobilise solidarity and resistance, and to enhance the capacity of people to engage in collective action for radical social change (in contrast to the mainstream political appeal of community as a means of sustaining the existing social order).

The aim of the book

More specifically, the aim of this book is to interrogate vying concepts in relation to community, social wellbeing, community safety and community cohesion, and to analyse how these ideas have shaped social policy developments in Britain. In offering a conceptually grounded treatment of these themes, the book sets out to encourage the reader to reflect upon what have been the practical and policy-oriented applications and consequences of these ideas over time. The book concludes by revisiting these core concepts and, in doing so, exposes myths and contradictions that commonly accompany such broad-range notions. What becomes apparent from the discussion set out in this book is that

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the general trajectory of interest in social wellbeing, community safety and community cohesion has focused primarily on threats to wellbeing, safety and cohesion posed by the attitudes or 'misdemeanours' of the least powerful – for example, welfare dependants, youth 'hanging around' public spaces and immigrants holding 'alien cultures'. This focus has served to distract attention away from the more serious social harms caused by the crimes and anti-social acts of the powerful – that is, those carried out by private corporations and governments. Moreover, this glitch in awareness has been aggravated by much of the exiting social policy and criminology literature. For example, in his edited volume on crime prevention and community safety, Nick Tilley, although initially acknowledging that mainstream definitions of crime and deviance largely reflect the dominant values of power-holders, unashamedly goes on to admit that his own treatment of these themes:

> though quite broad, relates only to a subset of crimes and harms that might form the focus of preventative attention. Professional malpractice, corporate malfeasance, terrorism, fraud, environmental crime, traffic offences, political crimes, anger about crime and most victimless crime, for example, are either not discussed at all or are mentioned only in passing. Instead the bias follows that of both literature and most present practice and policy, in homing in on volume property crime, violence, criminality, drugs and fear of crime.... [T]he selection included here largely reflects dominant assumptions about what matters most for policy and practice, and that is properly a matter for analysis and debate. (Tilley 2005: 7)

By focusing on 'dominant assumptions about what matters most for policy and practice', academics perpetuate distorted and prejudiced understandings of criminality and threats to safety. By focusing on the problems mainly addressed in state-sponsored community safety strategies – 'volume property crime, violence, criminality, drugs and fear of crime' – more serious threats to community safety are not being tackled. This is not to say that theft and street violence should be of no concern to social policy makers and practitioners. It is, however, to argue the case that more serious threats to community safety caused by the activities of the powerful – that is, the social harms to communities caused by pro-market policies (e.g. the effects of welfare cut-backs on life chances) or the actions of major corporations (e.g. environmental pollution) – is equally deserving (if not more so) of analysis and debate. This book seeks to address this lacuna in the social policy and

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criminology literature by offering a different conceptual understanding of community safety (and threats to social wellbeing and community cohesion) based on a more proportionate understanding of social harms inflicted on communities. More specifically, this book is concerned with the grave threats to community safety, cohesion and social wellbeing caused by the activities of governments and corporations wedded to the neo-liberal social policy agenda since the late-1970s. Richard Wilkinson's (2005) research is illuminating here as it demonstrates how people in more unequal societies (such as Britain) are more likely to experience premature death, greater morbidity, anxiety, suicide and alcoholism, and higher levels of violence. Downes and Hansen (2006) also show that countries with tighter restrictions on welfare rights for the poor have higher imprisonment rates – a trend Britain is emulating. Welfare retrenchment is a consequence of the actions of the powerful – the politicians and policy makers who have presided over (and continue to preside over) social reforms which emphasise the 'power of the market'. Today, British welfare is managed in accordance with market principles and governed by executives rather than via political accountability. In such a context, where the prime motivation is maximising returns or meeting centrally-defined government targets on economy, efficiency and effectiveness, the common wellbeing of society is of little concern. As Avner Offer identifies in his book *The Challenge of Affluence* (2006), the promotion of greater individualism and consumerism in society has been paralleled with a decline in social solidarity and trust – an 'eloquent restatement of Durkheim's sociological critique of anomic and egoistic forms of solidarity, in which the necessary social and moral containment of human aspirations and desires is made weak' (Rustin 2007: 76). As the Canadian law professor Joel Bakan observes, company executives subordinate all considerations to profit, an inevitable consequence of which is: 'the routine and regular harms caused to others – workers, consumers, communities, the environment. This, Bakan notes, makes the corporation essentially a "psychopathic creature", unable to recognise or act upon moral reasons to refrain from harming others' (Edwards and Cromwell 2006: 3).

Such executive-style interventions are now dominating the new forms of welfare organising established to deliver public services in Britain – in particular, the new networks and partnerships set up to deliver the government's crime and disorder and urban regeneration strategies, and also social protection, education, housing and health (see Chapter 4). 'These organisational forms, in practice, make it increasingly difficult to discern what is "public" about public services' (Newman

and Mahony 2007: 65) and appear to close down possibilities for engaging in an open public debate within a public realm. In such a context, opportunities for challenging the existing order of things appear to have become increasingly remote.

Despite these concerns, neo-liberal power-holders continue to espouse the 'TINA' mantra – that, in the context of globalisation, *there is no alternative* to market freedom and the liberalisation of all areas of welfare organising. Moreover, under New Labour, government measures aimed at restricting political dissent have been extended. Responding to the 'unprecedented' threat to community safety from 'anti-social behaviour' and 'terrorism' – a threat governments have largely generated themselves – the British state has justified the introduction of a plethora of repressive legislation that is increasingly being used to stifle democratic dissent. 'No act has been passed over the past 20 years with the aim of preventing antisocial behaviour, disorderly conduct, trespass, harassment and terrorism that has not also been deployed to criminalise a peaceful public engagement in politics' (Monbiot 2005a: 27). For example, the 1994 Criminal Justice Act – amended by New Labour in 2003 – was used on 30 September 2005 to convict six University of Lancaster students and graduates of aggravated trespass for protesting:

> against a 'corporate venturing' event involving multinational arms manufacturers and attended by a government minister. The university authorities took the view that their action breached the university's code on harassment and bullying and the ethical thing to do was to inform the police and have the students prosecuted and threatened with prison or antisocial behaviour orders. (MacLeod and Curtis 2005: 12)

The 'harassment' and 'bullying' in question took the form of entering a lecture theatre and handing out leaflets to the audience:

> Staff at the university were meeting people from BAE Systems, Rolls-Royce, Shell, the Carlyle Group, GlaxoSmithKline, DuPont, Unilever and Diageo, to learn how to 'commercialise university research'. The students were hoping to persuade the researchers not to sell their work. They were in the theatre for three minutes.... [T]hey tried neither to intimidate anyone nor to stop the conference from proceeding. (Monbiot 2005a: 27)

The 1997 Protection from Harassment Act was used by arms manufacturer EDO to keep demonstrators away from its factory gates and by the

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Kent police to arrest a woman who sent a drug company's executive two (polite) emails asking him not to test his products on animals (Monbiot 2005a). Furthermore, under the Act:

> In 2001 the peace campaigners Lindis Percy and Anni Rainbow were prosecuted for causing 'harassment, alarm or distress' to American servicemen at the Menwith Hill military intelligence base in Yorkshire, by standing at the gate holding the Stars and Stripes and a placard reading 'George W Bush? Oh dear!'. In Hull a protestor was arrested under the act for 'staring at a building'. (Monbiot 2005a: 27)

Section 132 of the 2005 Serious Organised Crime and Police Act introduced a ban on people demonstrating in any area 'designated' by government. 'One of these is the square kilometre around parliament' (Monbiot 2005a: 27). In addition, Section 44 of the 2000 Terrorism Act allows the police to stop and search people without a need to demonstrate to them that they have 'reasonable suspicion' that they have committed an offence, and to detain them for up to a month without charge. The police have used this power:

> to put peaceful protestors through hell. At the beginning of 2003, demonstrators against the impending war with Iraq set up a peace camp outside the military base at Fairford in Gloucestershire, from which US B52s would launch their bombing raids. Every day – sometimes several times a day – the protestors were stopped and searched under section 44. The police, according to a parliamentary answer, used the act 995 times, though they knew that no one at the camp was a terrorist. The constant harassment and detention pretty well broke the protestors' resolve. (Monbiot 2005a: 27)

More recently, Section 44 of the 2000 Terrorism Act was deployed against climate change protestors converging on Heathrow airport for a week's demonstration in August 2007. Despite climate change being one of the most urgent contemporary social problems facing governments throughout the world, prior to the Heathrow protest the police establishment were already labelling protestors 'criminals':

> The Metropolitan police chief, Sir Ian Blair, has said he fears a minority of protestors intent on breaking the law could cause massive disruption…. Met commander Jo Kaye, in charge of the specialist firearms unit, said some people would 'want to get their message

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> across using criminal means'. Scotland Yard's plans for handling the protests are revealed in a document…which was produced by Met commander Peter Broadhurst… . 'Should individuals or small groups seek to take action outside of lawful protest they will be dealt with robustly using terrorism powers'.…The police report makes it clear that the government has encouraged police forces to make greater use of terrorism powers 'especially the use of stop and search powers under s44 Terrorism Act 2000'. (Vidal and Pidd 2007: 1)

Powers legitimated in the name of 'war on terror' are being used in Britain to stifle and criminalise peaceful political dissent, narrowing possibilities for generating a broad democratic debate on crucial global issues.

Furthermore, prospects for progressive democratic practices in Britain are undermined by the presence of a docile media. In *Guardians of Power: The Myth of the Liberal Media*, Edwards and Cromwell uncover the systematic servility to power of the so-called 'liberal' British media – exemplified in its inability to expose the government's lies about the threat of weapons of mass destruction in the run up to the occupation of Iraq. This duplicity is not the result of state censorship but, as Edwards and Cromwell explain, free market forces – illustrated in the following extract from a related conversation between Andrew Marr (of the BBC) and Noam Chomsky:

> Marr…: 'What I don't get is that all of this suggests…people like me are self-censoring.' Chomsky disagreed: 'I don't say you're self-censoring. I'm sure you believe everything you're saying. But what I'm saying is, if you believed something different you wouldn't be sitting where you're sitting.' What Marr…'doesn't get' is that dissident arguments do not depend on conspiratorial self-censorship, but on a filter system maintained by free market forces – bottom-line pressures, owner influence, parent company goals and sensitivities, advertiser needs, business-friendly government influence and corporate PR 'flak' – which introduce bias by marginalising alternatives, providing incentives to conform and costs for failure to conform. (Edwards and Cromwell 2006: 89)

Further limits on democracy have come about as a result of key decisions affecting social wellbeing now being taken beyond the nation state by unaccountable global institutions – for example, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organisation and the

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World Bank. Consequently, Gordon Brown's dramatic plans for extending direct democracy at home, referred to above, would need to extend to the global level.

It is this parallel development in British society – the withdrawal of state support for social and economic wellbeing, alongside the erosion of a public space for expressing legitimate political dissent and engaging in democratic processes – that this book is mainly concerned for it is a development which arguably poses the greatest threat to the welfare of society. In short, the general hypothesis laid out in the pages that follow is that the existing societal arrangements for human relationships to be played out in British society will not lead to sustainable improvements in social wellbeing, community safety and community cohesion. In conclusion, the book offers an alternative perspective on promoting social wellbeing, community safety and community cohesion – one that emphasises the kind of institutional arrangements that are necessary for allowing the societal preconditions for maximising social wellbeing for the many to be put into effect. It is a perspective which recognises that the attainment of universal wellbeing, safety and cohesion in society is more likely to be gained through solidaristic relations with others rather than through individualistic endeavour.

This book will appeal to a wide range of interests including academics, final year undergraduates and postgraduate students from a range of disciplines (history, sociology, social policy, criminology, social anthropology, urban studies, planning, housing studies, public administration and community work), policy makers and welfare practitioners working in the fields of housing, planning, economic regeneration, health care, criminal justice, community safety, youth and community work, community development and so forth, and others interested in community issues. By drawing on current themes in the social sciences – such as theoretical debates on 'community', 'conflict' and notions of 'social harm' – the book will offer a conceptually grounded text for students, academics, policy makers and practitioners that will remain durable over time by retaining its academic and practical relevance. In this way too, the book will encourage reflection about community-related policies in a broader context that emphasises the links between these policies and the social structure. This offers an alternative understanding that encourages students to look beyond community action as a mere practice, requiring the application of technical skills, and to see it as an interesting, lively and contentious subject of social scientific enquiry.

Before moving on to describe the structure of the book, I set out some personal reflections on aspects of my own experience as a welfare

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practitioner and some of the key changes in social policy I have observed. Many of the post-1970s' changes analysed in this book have coincided with my own time working in the welfare sector. This started in 1976 when I was appointed co-ordinator of a battered women's refuge in Doncaster, more or less the same time Keynesian welfarism was starting to be abandoned in Britain when James Callaghan's Labour government converted to monetarism. My reflections therefore offer something of a benchmark in which to gauge some of the effects of social policy changes since that time – at least from the perspective of my own experiences. These observations are also consistent with feminist thinking which argues that the way in which the researcher is affected by the context of the research should be revealed. It seems honest to disclose that I am far from dispassionate in respect of the issues discussed in this book (although this may be obvious to the reader already!) and that my views have – to a significant extent – been shaped by my own biography. As May argues, the biography of the researcher is important:

> Both the researcher and those people in the research carry with them a history, a sense of themselves and the importance of their experiences. However, personal experience is frequently devalued as being too subjective, while science is objective. … Researchers should be aware of the ways in which their own biography is a fundamental part of the research process. It is both the experiences of the researched *and* researchers which are important. (May 2001: 21 – emphasis in original)

By setting out a brief autobiography of my work and some of the changes I experienced, I aim to situate my general thesis within a more engaged style of argument. Whilst I endeavour to present a robust thesis, some readers may find my critique polemical in tone. I do not apologise for this as I feel it offers a much needed antidote to the so-called 'balanced' accounts of social policy development which dominate the literature and which presuppose, as Durkheim did, the existence of a benign constitutional framework within which to conduct the debate on how best to promote human wellbeing. This book argues that such a framework does not exist and that the institutional arrangements for promoting human wellbeing in Britain are fundamentally flawed, corrupt and illegitimate. Perhaps one of the most salient illustrations of this is the ability of the establishment to not only 'move on' from its participation in a gross war crime – the war in Iraq – but also to reward one of the chief architects of this crime with a vast pay-off.

> The International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg ruled that 'to initiate a war of aggression ... is not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime'. The tribunal's charter placed 'planning, preparation, initiation or waging of a war of aggression' at the top of the list of war crimes. (Monbiot 2008: 24)

Instead of being called to account by the International Criminal Court for a crime that (to date) may have killed over a million people: 'The press and parliament appear to have heeded Blair's plea that we all "move on" from Iraq. The British establishment has a unique capacity to move on, and then to repeat its mistakes. What other former empire knows so little of its own atrocities?' (Monbiot 2008: 24).

Moreover, on top of his earnings as Middle East envoy for the US, Russia, EU and the UN, his £500,000 from speaking engagements and £5.8million deal with Random House for his memoirs, Tony Blair is appointed part-time adviser to JP Morgan Chase – the bank selected to operate the Trade Bank of Iraq, created by the US to manage billions of dollars to finance imports and exports – on another estimated £500,000 per annum (The New York Times 2003, Woodward 2008). More recently, Blair has been touted as the first full-time president of the EU council – effectively, 'president of Europe' (Wintour 2008a: 1). The fact that so little attention is directed at the crimes and lack of accountability of the powerful reflects the stranglehold of neo-liberal hegemony over policy making, practice and research in Britain, and the rise in selfish opportunism within the academic community. Here I share David Byrne's observation that 'Social science has been, rightly, accused of adopting a posture of palms up to the rich for the receipt of funding and eyes down to the poor as part of the surveillance necessary for their control' (Byrne 2006: 5). Certainly, the recent emphasis in mainstream social policy research has been about 'what works best' for treating, regulating, resocialising or punishing 'problem' individuals and dysfunctional communities – a research agenda that serves to maintain the privileges of the status quo. Unless we first acknowledge the need for acute structural change, the quest for universal community wellbeing will remain a futile one.

Personal reflections on a life in English 'welfare'

The themes addressed in this book are in part inspired by a life working in English social welfare – initially as a housing practitioner then latterly in higher education – and my concerns in respect of the effects of

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social policy changes on my own experience of changes in social relations in England. A central concern throughout my working life has been the concept of 'social justice' (in terms of my own and other people's social wellbeing) and the importance of engaging in collective action in pursuit of this notion whenever possible – often in defiance of mainstream policy and practice.

As mentioned above, I worked for Doncaster Women's Aid in the mid-1970s – a job I was always ambivalent about given the tension that existed between the radical and welfarist branches of feminism at the time (the former arguing that women's movements should work separately from men). This voluntary sector post was funded through Urban Aid, a stream of government funding which allowed a number of important and alternative social projects to set up and become established in local communities. After a year I moved into the voluntary housing sector, initially in Portsmouth and then, in the 1980s, in London which included periods with two housing associations actively engaged in promoting radically different and (what we believed to be) more humane ways of living and working 'in community'. Both associations identified themselves as 'community-based' and were organised as workers collectives (where each worker received equal pay and were jointly and severally responsible for day-to-day decision making). The associations' residents and other members of the local community – including representatives from black organisations, women's groups, squatting campaigns and other social movements – were encouraged to participate in the association either as members of the management committees or through partnership working. Both associations were funded by the Housing Corporation (the body responsible for funding and monitoring the activities of housing associations – to be reconstituted in 2009 as the Homes and Community Agency), the London Boroughs and the Greater London Council – the latter described at the time as 'the flagship of municipal socialism' (Lansley et al. 1989: 47). Despite the election of a Conservative government committed to welfare cutbacks in 1979, generous support (at least in London) for alternative community-based initiatives was still available in the mid-1980s.

One of the associations, Patchwork Community, specialised in the provision of communal living in mainly short-life properties (mostly due for rehabilitation or redevelopment) licensed from public authorities. In the majority of cases, the properties licensed were adjacent to each other – thereby presenting possibilities for building a spatial 'Patchwork community'. People in housing need would be allocated their own room and share the use of communal areas with other

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residents. Each house would also have someone described as having 'special needs' (e.g. a single parent, someone with 'mental health problems', an ex-offender, a young single homeless person or someone escaping domestic violence) allocated to it and the other residents would be expected to provide informal support if needed. In addition, all Patchwork workers were expected to live in a Patchwork house and provide an additional source of support. Patchwork's philosophy came close to that of such thinkers as R.D. Laing (1960), Ivan Illich (1977) and Erving Goffman (1963, 1968) – advocates of the anti-psychiatry movement. Laing himself had established a community psychiatric project at Kingsley Hall in the east end of London where the patients and therapists lived together. The three were all concerned with the disabling effects of institutionalised social care and the activities of 'experts' who practised within these establishments. Patchwork offered a genuine alternative to such institutions and, in recognition of this, qualified for Housing Corporation hostel deficit grant – a revenue subsidy towards the care costs of these schemes. Capital grants were also available for essential repairs to ensure that the properties licensed were habitable.

Writing about Patchwork in 1982, David Donnison described it as 'one of the best organised communes' he had come across, run by people who 'believed they had found a better way of living' (Donnison 1982: 100–101). By the late 1980s, however, Patchwork had lost its collective status and, in the 1990s, its management committee became increasingly manipulated through Housing Corporation interference. In January 2006, the ownership of the association's assets was transferred by the Housing Corporation to Community Housing Group in Camden. Around the same time, the Housing Corporation also enforced the take-over of the other collective I had worked for – Solon Wandsworth Housing Association (SWHA – which had retained its collective management structure to the very end). One of the stated reasons for SWHA's take-over was its 'failure' to exploit its 'commercial opportunities' sufficiently or – in the words of a Housing Corporation appointee to SWHA's management committee – in a sufficiently 'aggressive manner' (cited in Beckmann and Cooper 2005a: 9). However, the main criticism of SWHA was reserved for its management structure. The Inquiry Report conducted under powers contained in the 1996 Housing Act claimed that: 'Solon's real weakness flows from the ineffective working of its collective institutions, which have proved ineffective and inefficient … . Because the meetings endeavour to operate by consensus they take a very long time … [and] implementing decisions is a matter of negotiation' (cited in Beckmann and Cooper 2005a: 9).

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Clearly, negotiation, deliberation and consensus no longer have a place in the model of welfare organising urged by the new managerialism – indeed, they are seen as values that constitute a threat to organisational efficiency.

The character of the housing association movement was to profoundly change following the implementation of the 1988 Housing Act and the introduction of a new financial regime for development programmes. Since 1974, the development costs of associations' housing schemes attracted generous government subsidies which allowed rents to be kept well below the 'market' rate. Indeed, rents were fixed by the government's Rent Officer in advance of the completion of a scheme and based on the size of accommodation and amenities provided (a 'fair rent' not based on market value). After deducting an allowance for management and maintenance costs from this 'fair rent', an amount available to pay for the development costs would be calculated – usually coming to around five per cent of the total scheme cost. The remaining 95 per cent of costs would be covered by a one-off grant payment. The effect of this system was that the rents were generally affordable – particularly for people in paid work but on low incomes. The 1988 Act changed this system by forcing associations to rely more on private capital finance and commercial interest rates. Instead of the rents being determined in advance now the grant payment would be pre-determined (at a much lower rate) and the rents calculated on completion of the scheme. Rents rose dramatically (towards market levels) due to the reduced grant rate and higher interest payments. The culture of associations changed and came to resemble the commercial sector with a greater emphasis on risk and cost control: for example, less risky developments were pursued (such as new build schemes on sites in less costly locations – at the cost of inner-city rehabilitation); standards were reduced (to cut costs) and greater emphasis was placed on whether or not a prospective resident would pay the rent when allocating homes (increasingly, applicants who qualified for housing benefit would be chosen because direct rent payments could be guaranteed – at the cost of applicants in paid work and earning just above the threshold for claiming housing benefit). A major effect of these changes was that associations in the 1990s increasingly housed poorer households on benefit in poorer quality housing – generating, as some of us working in the housing association movement had predicted – a 'residualised' (Malpass 2000) housing sector. At the same time, housing officers increasingly found it difficult to offer the 'care' element they had traditionally provided as part of their role – a part of the role that had initially attracted many people into housing

work. 'Care' has little value within the market paradigm. One colleague at Solon at the time believed that the housing officer of the future would become more like a robot. Whilst it could be argued that this denies agency, certainly the marketisation and fragmentation of social housing provision that followed from the 1980s made resistance to the imposition of a business culture more difficult.

Developments within the voluntary sector in Britain since the late 1980s have been eloquently analysed by Andy Benson, the founder of the National Coalition for Independent Action (NCIA). Benson believes that the voluntary sector in that time has been co-opted by government, with the complicity of large multimillion-pound national charities acting as businesses. Moreover, this has had profound negative consequences for the sector:

> Over the last 22 years, I've seen the voluntary sector being deliberately co-opted by the state.... It is the role and right of the voluntary sector to take independent action, to pursue divergent interests and to hold the state to account, and this is what is under threat....This is about our collective belief to identify our own perspectives and pursue them. This is about our collective liberties. (Cited in Kelly 2008: 5)

The closing down of the voluntary sector's space to engage in radical alternative action has been achieved, Benson argues, through the government's use of 'regulation, quality assurance standards, managerialism and punitive social policies' (cited in Kelly 2008: 5) – and 'commissioning' voluntary organisations to meet an agenda defined by central government.

> Small and medium-sized charities providing public services won't have the freedom to look downwards to their communities; they'll have to look up to their commissioners, who will be the ones deciding which services are the most appropriate....By trying to take over this space, the government is launching an attack on our freedom to take any kind of positive voluntary action to address needs we consider important. They're taking every last bit of power away from communities, because they don't trust the public to do anything on our own. (Cited in Kelly 2008: 5)

Because of such imminent changes in the voluntary housing sector in the late 1980s – changes I really did not feel I wanted to engage with – I

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left the housing association movement in 1989 to move into higher education – joining (the then) South Bank Polytechnic as a senior lecturer in housing studies (primarily teaching day-release students from housing organisations enrolled on a vocational postgraduate diploma validated by the Chartered Institute of Housing – the CIH) – with the expectation that this would provide me with a better opportunity to critically engage with the housing debate. To the uninitiated, housing studies may be thought of as merely concerned with the production and consumption of housing. Whilst it does relate to these issues, it is also an area of study that reflects housing's interdependence with major relationships of power. So, for instance, housing (or rather, our residential experience) is both a reflection and source of social advantage or disadvantage – that is, housing both reflects wealth or social status (based on class, 'race' and gender) and presents opportunities (or not) for further benefits gained through wealth accumulation (via the increase in value of the property) and access to local amenities (such as better schools or a healthier environment).

Housing has also been important for protecting dominant interests in capitalist societies – in Britain, for instance, subsidised council housing in 1919 was seen as a 'bulwark against bolshevism', while the 'Right to Buy' legislation in 1980 helped to break working-class solidarity by dividing the interests of the affluent, skilled working class (who gained most from the sale of council housing) from those of the unskilled and unemployed (who invariably remained left behind in the least desirable council housing estates). At the same time, housing has also been a site for resistance and there is a rich history of urban social protest based around housing campaigns – for instance, the 1915 Rent Strikes, squatting movements and the more recent Defend Council Housing campaign. Much of my own teaching and research has been concerned with these struggles, particularly through the work I have done on the CIH's *National Certificate in Tenant Participation* – a day-release course aimed at tenant activists and housing workers committed to user involvement. This work also influenced my research agenda in the 1990s which included a couple of co-authored/ co-edited books on tenant participation and community action (Cooper and Hawtin 1997, 1998) – work which highlights the utility of participation and community for both facilitating the agenda of governments (e.g. privatising council housing or management efficiency gains) and mobilising community resistance (e.g. against the privatisation of council housing). The lessons from this work filtered back into my teaching with tenants and activists. In particular, introducing students to approaches to

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community development based on Freirean pedagogy helped some on the course to address their own internalised disabling notions of 'failure'. Other students applied lessons from the course to their own local campaigns for improved housing conditions – such as one organised by Stephen Wyatt (a tenant activist) and described in 'The Pugilist's Guide to Tenant Participation' (see Cooper and Wyatt 1997).

Also in the 1990s, I developed an interest in comparative housing studies and exploring the policy implications of successes and failures evident through cross-national comparative research. This included an EC-funded TEMPUS project researching and designing a Masters Programme in Comparative Urban Planning and Housing with a university in Sofia in 1995 – a course aimed at architects and planners interested in understanding the options for transforming the Bulgarian housing and planning system following the fall of communism. This involved applying a comparative research framework designed by James Barlow and Simon Duncan (Barlow and Duncan 1994) – based largely upon Esping-Andersen's (1990) typology of welfare capitalist systems – to an assessment of the efficacy of different capitalist planning systems. Comparing the systems of Britain, France and Sweden, this study suggested that the more regulated planning systems of Europe (i.e. Sweden and France) produced greater production and consumption efficiencies in terms of the quality, cost and affordability of the housing developed, and the wider choices of tenure available (with lower levels of social polarisation between tenures). There was also lower volatility in housing production over time. In 1996, I received a British Council grant to conduct a further study on tenants' democracy in Sweden. This work demonstrated the benefits gained by social housing tenants in Sweden from having firmly established autonomous resident movements which allowed them a greater say over substantive areas of housing policy (Cooper 1998). More generally, because of its strong welfarist tradition, extensive political rights and relatively egalitarian share of income distribution, Swedish society achieved a more distinctive balance between freedom and solidarity with relatively high levels of self-assessed social wellbeing (Jordan 2006). Through comparative housing studies, therefore, it was possible to expose the harmful effects of neo-liberal social policy reforms in Britain in relation to the stability of the housing market and social solidarity, cohesion and wellbeing – harms which have recently been acknowledged by Gordon Brown's government.

In the late 1990s, I worked on a co-authored evaluation of New Labour's 'modernisation' agenda for social policy (Burden et al. 2000).

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This research exposed the exclusionary effects of New Labour's third way welfare discourse including, in particular, its focus on 'social inclusion' through 'paid work' – a flawed concept given that wages in today's casualised labour market remain far too low to guarantee full social participation. Moreover, it is an idea that discounts other ways of 'being' in society such as caring for others or being active within the local community. As Bill Jordan argues, despite the rhetoric of inclusion and autonomy in New Labour's welfare discourse:

> [T]he main thrust of the Third Way notion of autonomy – independence through employment, earning and property – tended to devalue both those who needed care (who were therefore by definition 'dependent') and those who looked after them without pay (who qualified for benefit as carers, but only if they withdrew from full participation in the labour market). The liberal individualism of a political philosophy built upon the choices of free-standing property owners relegated care to the shadows, and supported it with reluctance and stigma.... In this approach, responsibility was primarily towards the self, for realizing potential through paid work and ownership, and only very secondarily towards mutuality in family and kinship groups.... (Jordan 2006: 164)

Under the terms of the new social order constructed by neo-liberalism, it became clear to us that little value is placed on showing commitment and loyalty to others. More generally, as John Clarke has observed, much of the care work in social welfare has been lost – 'beyond the contract', irrelevant to 'performance' (Clarke 2004: 122). This is borne out by comparing today's housing assistant job descriptions with those of the late-1970s when I first worked for a housing association – the former stress the role of dealing with 'anti-social behaviour' whilst the latter underlined the role of 'welfare support'. Bauman (2001) explains this change in terms of the absence of community in late modern times – that is, community in the sense of the collective provision of social solidarity and security. Put simply, a lack of care. All this, in turn, corrodes community cohesion and social wellbeing – a situation that has important policy implications: if rampant individualism wrought by years of neo-liberal reforms has eroded the societal preconditions needed for collective social wellbeing, how do we establish the conditions for community cohesion and social wellbeing to be restored? As Wright argues, if the existing institutional arrangements for social organising are generating harms, we need 'to formulate *alternatives*

which mitigate those harms, and to propose *transformative strategies* for realising those alternatives' (Wright 2007: 26 – emphasis in original). In our own critique of New Labour's welfare reforms we argued the case for a Basic Citizen's Income (BCI) – an unconditional (i.e. non-means tested and with no work requirement) cash payment payable to every individual as of right and throughout their lives. The level at which this BCI would be set would be sufficient to meet people's basic human needs – defined in accordance with prevailing social norms (Burden et al. 2000). We justified this on the grounds that it would ensure that everyone would have the capacity to make autonomous choices in relation to their life plans by supporting people's financial inclusion; and it is affordable. As David Purdy argues, a BCI would:

> ...enhance people's freedom in the sphere of work. It would provide the flexibility to move in and out of paid work as needs and circumstances change. If it was set at or above subsistence level, it would offer protection against exploitation, and a lever for improving pay and conditions at the lower end of the labour market. It would also provide an opportunity to pursue activities that are financially unrewarding, but intrinsically gratifying. In effect, [BCI] would subsidise activities in the household and voluntary sectors of the economy, thereby countering the current bias in favour of getting and spending. (Purdy 2007: 59)

A BCI 'would help to initiate a long-term, gradual process of socio-cultural transformation ... and facilitate the transition from boundless economic growth to balanced social development' (Purdy 2007: 59) and, as a consequence, enhanced social wellbeing. Wright lends support to the BCI concept on similar grounds:

> [F]irst, it facilitates the expansion of non-commodified productive activity in a wide range of domains – care-giving, artistic production and performance, community building – by guaranteeing the participants in such activities a basic standard of living unconnected to market earnings, and second, it shifts the balance of power from capital to labour by giving workers greater bargaining power both individually (because of the option of quitting given jobs or exiting the labour market altogether) and collectively (because [BCI] functions as a permanent unconditional strike fund). (Wright 2007: 30)

In addition to the importance of financial security for individual and collective social wellbeing, it is also important for people to feel that

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they can have some influence on policy decisions affecting their lives. As in the case of Sweden:

> [A] political culture of democratic membership, where all citizens are treated with equal respect and feel able to influence the decisions of their government, might be expected to lead to high and rising rates of happiness. ... Among the countries with the highest levels of self-assessed well-being are Denmark, Norway, Finland and Sweden ... , all of which have very stable political systems with social democratic institutions ... . (Jordan 2006: 177)

In order to rejuvenate the political engagement of disadvantaged communities – that is, those communities effectively marginalised and disenfranchised in British society – our own analysis of New Labour's welfare reforms sought to identify ways of establishing a new political environment in which active citizenship could thrive. To enable this, we argue the case for radical community development based on the principles of Paulo Freire (alluded to earlier) and his emphasis on empowering disadvantaged people to engage collectively in political action (Burden et al. 2000). We will return to this later in the book but, briefly here, the aim of radical community development is to rebuild collegiality and social solidarity against oppression and alienation, and to support collective strategies that seek to improve the wellbeing of all communities – for instance, instead of communities dividing in their search for the 'best' school for their child, a search which leaves the poorest communities left with the 'worst' performing schools, communities could, as an alternative strategy, organise collectively around campaigns demanding a more humane and quality education system for all – benefiting society more broadly.

The form an alternative education system might take is an issue I have explored over more recent years. Certainly, there are increasing concerns being expressed about British state education – particularly with regard to the relevance of the curriculum, the value of the testing regime and the implications of divisions within the school system for social inclusion, community cohesion and personal wellbeing. My own research has raised serious concerns about the capacity of the existing education system to be inclusionary and, as a corollary, to be socially just (Cooper 2002). This systematic failing can be conceptualised within the context of Foucault's (1976) observations on the utility of education systems for the production of docile bodies and the maintenance of existing power relations. Those who dare challenge

education's disciplinary regime – not just pupils, but parents/carers and teachers alike – risk censure from its strict practices. The intensification of market forces and the new managerialism in schooling since the 1980s has worked against education's role in promoting humanistic values. The relentless focus on testing, targets, league tables and competition is causing disaffection and unhappiness amongst many children. Many pupils feel under pressure from a curriculum they consider to be meaningless and from teachers who treat them with disrespect. Meanwhile, many teachers feel they have lost autonomy over their work and are unable to care for pupils as they would wish. This has serious consequences for social policy as many children excluded from school have special educational needs which are not being catered for (Cooper 2002). Alan Smithers (key adviser to the Commons Education Select Committee) argues that 'schools have been reduced almost to factories for producing test and exam scores' (cited in Guardian Unlimited 2007: 1). A report submitted to the Commons Education Select Committee in June 2007 by the General Teaching Council (the professional body for teaching) called for all national exams for under-16-year-olds to be banned because:

> ...the stress caused by over-testing is poisoning attitudes towards education.... [E]xams are failing to improve standards, leaving pupils demotivated and stressed and encouraging bored teenagers to drop out of school.... [T]eachers are being forced to 'drill' pupils to pass tests instead of giving a broad education.... Psychologists have reported going into schools at unprecedented rates to tackle exam stress, with children as young as six suffering from anxiety. (Asthana 2007: 1)

Predictably, Alan Johnson, then Secretary of State for Education, countered with the managerialist defence that scrapping tests 'would be "profoundly wrong".... [T]hey had helped raise attainment and provided a transparency and accountability that parents valued' (BBC News 2007b). Meanwhile, many teachers continue to 'fear to speak out' (Cooper 2004: 17) against the harms caused by the school system – closing off the prospect for an open and free dialogue on how to generate a more humane education system. The liberalisation of the education system is increasingly threatening education's purpose for facilitating critical thinking, respect and empathy. This has clear implications for the kind of society we are creating.

Since the late-1970s, education's role has been increasingly defined in terms of its relevance to the needs of commerce and industry – with a

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correspondingly reduced emphasis on its role for preserving a more just, caring and democratic set of social relations (Beckmann and Cooper 2004, 2005b). A theme initially introduced by Labour Prime Minister James Callaghan in October 1976 (in his Ruskin College Speech) – that is, that the educational establishment was failing to prepare young people for the world of work – remains with us under New Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown in 2008. Shortly after becoming Prime Minister, Brown announced the establishment of a new Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) which would have a remit to ensure that higher education played a key role in improving the skills base needed for economic growth. (Pre-19 education becomes the responsibility of a new Department for Children, Schools and Families). This continued emphasis on university involvement in developing skills perceived as economically valuable in an increasingly unstable labour market discounts the wider social benefits from a higher education system that, as Bob Brecher argues, challenges dominant conventions and helps people develop critical understanding and intellectual self-confidence (Brecher 2007). According to Brecher, university lecturers are being driven to become little more than 'time-serving, low-level learning managers in a degree factory' (Brecher 2007: 42). As Henry Giroux warns:

> [H]igher education is aggressively shorn of its utopian impulses. Undermined as a repository of critical thinking, writing, teaching, and learning, universities are refashioned to meet the interests of commerce and regulation. In the current onslaught against non-commercial public spheres, the mission of the university becomes instrumental; it is redesigned largely to serve corporate interests whose aim is to restructure higher education along the lines of global capitalism. (Giroux 2000: 115)

These personal reflections and observations illustrate some of the deeply-felt changes in the nature of welfare organising in England that I have experienced since 1976 – particularly in the fields of housing and education (themes that reappear later in the book in support of the general thesis argued). Failings in the housing and education systems in particular have been fundamental to the exacerbation of spatial and social exclusion in Britain – with profound consequences for community safety, cohesion and social wellbeing. In particular, democratic accountability in welfare organisations has been lost as spaces for collective action and critical dissent have been closed off. Socially and

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residentially, we have become increasingly polarised whilst notions of social justice have been corroded. As a result, the ways we live and work together in British society have been dehumanised. Our lives appear increasingly fraught with danger as the collective provision of social protection and care is diminished. The main reason for this situation lies in the (flawed) assumptions about social wellbeing in neo-liberal thinking.

Challenging the assumptions of neo-liberal philosophy

According to neo-liberal philosophy, social wellbeing rests on allowing individuals 'free choice' – unhampered by state interference. It emerges in a context where people are encouraged to be more responsible for themselves and their dependants – on being independent, autonomous beings, free to explore their full potential and, in doing so, contribute to the prosperity and progress of society as a whole. Human wellbeing relies on individual liberty and freedom from the coercion of others (particularly state authorities). Accordingly, neo-liberal ideology assumes that: 'well-being is most reliably sustained and improved by the actions of ordinary individuals, because these are co-ordinated by processes beyond the imaginative scope or political control of governments. In other words, *well-being relies on the unintended collective consequences of individual choices'* (Jordan 2006: 127 – emphasis in original).

However, neo-liberalism in practice does not serve the interests of individual free choice nor enables individuals to take responsibility for their lives. Neo-liberal practices do not assist individuals to become autonomous beings nor achieve human wellbeing. Moreover, neo-liberalism does not free us from the political control of governments. Indeed, since the late-1970s in Britain, the converse has happened. In the interest of freedom, progress and human wellbeing, neo-liberal states have intervened *against* the interest of many people's social wellbeing. For example, neo-liberal states:

> saw the loss of manufacturing sites as a necessary process of adaptation; they regarded bankruptcies and redundancies as aspects of 'creative destruction'; they facilitated the firing of workers and the weakening of trade unions; and they cut benefits and services to encourage unemployed people to be more mobile, motivated and self-reliant. ... At the same time, some of the least skilled members of the workforce – especially those in one-earner families and lone

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> parents – lost ground relative to the mainstream. Members of minority ethnic groups were more polarized than the white majority; the poorest fell into destitution.... (Jordan 2006: 64–66)

According to Jordan, under neo-liberalism, the social wellbeing of many citizens – not just the poorest – has become extremely precarious. As mutuality and collective bonds disappear, we all have to become more self-reliant and develop our own personal and material resources to cope with all eventualities of risk at whatever stage of our life cycle. For many of us, this has involved getting into increasing personal debt to pay for the cost of housing, health insurance, education, pensions and social care needs. Meanwhile, work for many of us has become increasingly unsatisfying, stressful and insecure. These changes are leading, as writers such as Robert E. Lane and Richard Layard suggest, to a general decline in happiness and social wellbeing in society (see Jordan 2006). A concern for the powerful is that these same changes are posing a threat to community safety and cohesion in British society. Because of welfare retrenchment over the past 30 years, the state can no longer counter these threats effectively without finding alternative sites of social control. Hence, the New Labour government's appeal to the institutions of civic society – families and communities – to become more responsible for their own wellbeing and more proactive in generating mutual aid and restoring social cohesion. This appeal, however, is founded on flawed assumptions based on communitarian values which idealise 'community' itself as unproblematic – unified, cohesive and compliant.

In reality, communities are made up of different and diverse interests that invariably come into conflict with each other (e.g. based on 'race', class, gender, age and sexuality). This book interrogates these mainstream 'commonsense' notions and assumptions about community more deeply and, in doing so, offers a more nuanced, critical assessment of the effects of community-focused social policy reforms on community safety, cohesion and wellbeing in Britain. It will do this by revisiting the way concepts and discourses of community, safety and cohesion have been used over time, how these have shaped social policy developments, and what have been the effects in relation to community safety and social wellbeing. The book will conclude by offering a different reading of community safety, cohesion and social wellbeing, and the role community might play – as a site of *conflict* and *resistance* (i.e. where human agency is played out in practice) – in realising an alternative, egalitarian vision of social wellbeing. To a significant extent, we share many of the concerns of the left-of-centre pressure group Compass and its

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vision of the good society – a vision of ways of social organising that counteract the social harms reaped by neo-liberalism:

> We have become a more unequal and divided society. Levels of personal debt are unprecedented, and we are time-poor, working long hours either to make ends meet or to buy the ever-changing trappings of success. Alongside economic insecurity a new set of social problems has emerged – widespread mental illness, systematic loneliness, growing numbers of psychologically damaged children, eating disorders, obesity, alcoholism and drug addiction. (Shah and Rutherford 2006: 28)

The presence of such harms in our society means that a wider debate about the kind of society we want – one involving a broad constituency – is now essential.

> Progressive politics is impossible without a vision of what could be. We need to create a society based on the freedom of everyone to flourish. This requires that we all have the resources, time and political recognition to live our lives to the full. We want a culture that understands that humans are interdependent, social and emotional beings, fundamentally oriented towards, and dependent upon, other people. Such a society must have at its core social justice, environmental sustainability and quality of life. (Shah and Rutherford 2006: 28)

It is this search for an alternative vision of society – one that promotes the safety and wellbeing of all (social justice) – that this book is principally concerned.

The structure of the book

The analysis explored in this book is structured into five chapters. Chapter 1 places the themes community and conflict into historical context. It traces the changing social, political and economic context within which community relations and tensions have been played out throughout modern times, and the dominant discourses that emerged in relation to these themes. What this coverage reveals is that community relations in modern Britain have largely been shaped within the context of a deeply divided society, socially and spatially, and that an enduring symptom of this fissure has been communities in conflict. What it also illustrates is that whilst the language and emphasis of these

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discourses may have changed over time, what they are addressing or talking about is largely the same thing – or, as Foucault termed it, 'the same field of battle' (Foucault 2005: 142) – that is, from the perspective of the powerful, the need to protect the interests and safety of the privileged by managing risks posed by 'dangerous communities' (be they the 'residuum', 'underclass' or 'socially excluded') within a divided society; and from the perspective of the oppressed, the need to assert their own needs and demands through engaging in community action and conflict.

Chapter 2 then explores different conceptual understandings of community and conflict in order to illustrate the contestability of these ideas. This examination focuses on two meaningful competing notions of community and conflict – one which sees community as the solution to social conflict (where conflict is interpreted in negative terms – something bad) and a counterweight to threats posed by 'dangerous' people; the other which sees community as a potential site for mobilising social conflict (where conflict is interpreted in positive terms – something good) as resistance or in pursuit of positive social transformation. The former offers an understanding of the utility of community and conflict for the state and how these concepts have been exploited to legitimise social policy interventions aimed at ensuring compliance and domination – an understanding more recently associated with communitarian thinking. In contrast, the latter offers an assessment of the utility of these same concepts for understanding possibilities for generating a transformative community politics in the interest of social justice. This chapter, therefore, establishes the analytical framework that will be used to scrutinise the utility of the concepts community and conflict for legitimising social policy interventions by the powerful and for mobilising collective action in pursuit of social justice by radical social movements.

Chapter 3 analyses the community-focused policies pursued since 1997 under the administrations of New Labour – particularly in relation to community safety, urban regeneration and community cohesion. This analysis will illustrate the way New Labour's discourse on community and safety is heavily rooted in communitarian ideology. According to this position, community safety, cohesion and wellbeing will be enhanced through people interacting with each other as neighbours, families and friends ('in community'). Interacting together in this way will lead to a strengthening of civic society in which people will experience improved social, political and economic wellbeing. However, this notion of community is problematic – based, as it is, on

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a naïve assumption that individuals can be socially engineered into homogeneous communities characterised by shared social values. As commented on above, this is rarely the case as communities invariably consist of different and diverse interest groups – some of whom will feel isolated and alienated from the mainstream values that inevitably dominate the agenda within the new networks and partnerships that have been set up to oversee the delivery of 'community-focused' local services. It is argued here that New Labour's policies will not succeed in generating their stated aims on community cohesion and wellbeing because they continue to fail to acknowledge these power differentials and structured inequalities in society – focusing instead on the communitarian preoccupation with the 'cultural deficit' of 'failed communities'. This also raises questions about whose interests are being met through these community-focused social policies.

Chapter 4 revisits the core concepts of community safety, cohesion and wellbeing in order to expose a number of myths and contradictions that are evident in mainstream social policy discourse around these three themes and to present a different reading based upon a more proportionate understanding of threats to social wellbeing. In particular, this chapter looks beyond dominant interpretations that focus on the relatively minor misdemeanours of the least advantaged to focus instead on the destructive effects of the 'anti-social' policies and practices of government and private corporations. This exposure illustrates how economic change and the social policy choices of the powerful since the 1980s have contributed to the emergence of a less supportive society and, as a consequence, increasing exposure to risk for many people.

In the final chapter of the book, we revisit the core concepts of community and conflict again in order to assess the utility of these notions for facilitating the development of a broad constituency of critical understanding and support for a more progressive vision of community wellbeing – one that is advantageous to all. Here, we draw on critical theories of community and conflict, described in Chapter 2, to stress these concepts' transformative capacities and the possibilities for transcending the established order of things in order to generate the societal preconditions whereby all people can share in opportunities to achieve their aspirations and attain a sense of social wellbeing – effectively, an alternative vision of comprehensive community wellbeing for all.

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