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Profit, poverty and public care: austerity's charity work

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'Profit, poverty and public care: austerity's charity work'

Abstract

Purpose:

This paper explores empirically the dynamics by which austerity, a 'moment' of neoliberal policy reform enacted through strategies of market-driven governance, provides the conditions for the insertion of capitalist-market logics into the charity sector. Demonstrating altered funding structures permit a political and socioeconomic reconfiguration of poverty, it asks what this means for charity work.

Design/methodology/approach:

The paper draws upon data from 12 months ethnographic fieldwork in a charity in England. It explores the permeation of competition and profit as logics of capitalist-markets.

Findings:

The paper finds capitalist-market rationales are enacted within the organization. Charity is subordinated to business and profit permeates the site, thus changing the way that poverty is acted upon. In this context, workers are engaged in 'labours of negotiation' which ultimately impede a reconfiguration of poverty *into* profit via their everyday situated labour. This reveals the symptomatic activities of upholding an ethos of public care in the production of charity work and within a context of market-driven governance.

Originality/value:

This paper makes an empirical contribution to the debate on contemporary charity working under austerity. It makes an important conceptual contribution by adding to the emerging literature on market-driven governance (Varga, 2016); by repositioning du Gay's (2003) analysis of public reform into alternative empirical and analytical conditions; and by building upon Adams' (2013) work around the replacement of an ethos of public care with one of private profit.

Keywords:

Austerity. Charity. Poverty. Profit. Public care. Frontline service work. Market-driven governance.

Introduction

This paper explores empirically the dynamics by which austerity, a historical 'moment' of neoliberal policy reform enacted through strategies of market-driven governance, provides the conditions for the insertion of capitalist-market logics into the charity sector. It does so by demonstrating the primary mechanism of change, namely the altered funding structures which permit a political and socioeconomic reconfiguration of poverty. The paper explores ethnographically the permeation of logics of capitalist-markets; namely competition and profit. It finds a market-based rationale of competition is enacted within the organization via binary oppositional logics, as charity is subordinated to business. A capitalist-market rationale of profit permeates the charity site, changing the way that poverty is organizationally understood and acted upon.

Building on Adams' (2013) work around the replacement of an ethos of public care with one of private profit, the paper asks what the insertion of an ethos of profit into charity work means for this setting, and for how the work gets done in contemporary UK charity work under austerity. Ultimately, the paper argues that these workers are engaged in 'labours of negotiation' in order to sustain an ethos of public care. This reveals the judicious efforts characterizing the complex production of charity work as these two value-bases collide.

The paper unfolds in the following directions. Firstly, it begins by tracing a brief historical lineage of the ideological project envisioned by a commitment to neoliberalism, and proposes treating austerity as an opportunistic adaptation of this commitment (Peck and Theodore, 2012). The argument is informed by the concept of market-driven governance (Somers, 2008; Varga, 2016) and illustrated by examining how the UK charity sector has been inducted into logics of capitalist-markets; namely those of competition and profit. Following this theoretical introduction, an ethnographic account of contemporary UK charity work is presented, exploring the organizational and individual manifestations of capitalist-market rationales of competition and profit, and the labours of negotiation workers undertake to navigate this changed terrain. Conclusions then follow, in which the paper argues these labours of negotiation are symptomatic activities of upholding an ethos of public care within a context of market-driven governance. Thus, individual workers bear responsibility to buffer a full enactment of a reconfiguration of poverty into notions of profit through their daily work. They do so via personal, social and political commitments to an ethos of public care: an ethic increasingly less congruous with the organizationally-sanctioned ethics attached to their role.

Market-driven governance: The profitmaking capacities of public and social care

In its simplest form the ideological framework of the neoliberal project symbolizes the imperative of markets over state or societal intervention. In practice, the "emphatic turn towards neoliberalism in

political-economic practices and thinking" (Harvey, 2007:2) has occurred through agendas of decentralization, deregulation, privatization, and government withdrawal from public and welfare provision. In the UK, austerity (the principle fiscal policies introduced in 2010) functions as a historical 'moment' in the commitment to this ideological lineage. In this way, austerity policies are a situated and opportunistic adaptation of neoliberalism (Peck and Theodore, 2012). This argument is informed by the concept of market-driven governance (MDG) (Somers, 2008; Varga, 2016), and achieved by examining how the UK charity sector has (since the onset of this 'moment' of austerity) been further inducted into logics of capitalist-markets; namely competition and profit. Accepting that markets are state-enforced, "it is more appropriate to speak about a neo-liberal *market-driven governance*... that provides new ways to bring the logic of the market into governmental action" (Varga, 2016:2). As these capitalist-market rationales are government sanctioned, this ought not to be considered the 'retreat of the state' so valorised in neoliberal rhetoric. Responsibility for social care and provision to address poverty, traditionally delivered (or at least funded) by government, is conferred to competitive private business by way of capitalist-market formations. In this way, MDG is a strategy that can be implemented through, for example, "'local" measures, such as the marketization of public industries and services" (Ibid: 3), and the profitmaking capacities of public and social care are sanctioned in this move. As Somers (2008: 5-6) insists, "market-driven governance has in no way ended government involvement in socioeconomic affairs. Market-driven governance simply offers new ways to bring the market and its rationalities of profit into governance". In this way, 'the state' cannot be separated from this discussion, as government actions or sanctioned policies create and maintain these arrangements. Indeed, the economic order is constituted through political decisions (Polanyi, 1944).

With the state integral to this condition, engagement with the concept of MDG as strategies of neoliberalism assists in foregrounding major economic actors, and/or the structural arrangements they sustain, which is particularly useful for this paper through the positioning of the ethnographic detail within its tangible framework. As Foucault (2008: 131) suggested, "the problem of neoliberalism was not to cut out or contrive a free space of the market within an already given political society... The problem of neoliberalism is rather how the overall exercise of political power can be modelled on the principles of a market economy."

Adams (2013) suggests MDG shifts the poor and poverty into becoming a site for the creation of profit. Drawing upon Somers' (2008) work, she argues that an ethics of public care has been 'subtly replaced' with an ethics of private profit. As Adams (2013: 9) suggests, "new regimes of marketized governance...enable the needy to become a site for the production of capital". This paper takes this position and sets it within the UK charity sector exploring, "what neoliberalism *is* today as a form of

market-driven governance" (Ibid) in relation to contemporary charity work, and the complexities involved in maintaining the ethics of office that public and welfare work is historically imbued with (Weber, 1978; du Gay, 2000). It probes whether, or how far, need is in effect *transformed into* profit (Adams, 2013: 8).

To be sure, business and managerialist practice intruding into UK public and social arenas, or a mixed economy of care (Baines et al, 2011), is not a new occurrence. Canons of New Public Management have been entrenched for some time (Clarke and Newman, 1997), with New Labour securing the charity sector as 'governable terrain' (Carmel and Harlock, 2008). However, under austerity the retraction of state-financed support for both organizations and citizens, occurring in tandem with the closure of many state and charity agencies and at such a heightened pace (Civil Exchange, 2016), coupled with the MDG insertion of capitalist-market logics into the charity sector, suggests austerity and New Public Management reforms occurred within distinctive social and political contexts, which function to maintain the perpetual 'non-death' of neoliberalism (Crouch, 2011). In this way, whilst austerity characterizes the strong lineage of this ideology in public policy, it also represents a movement or an opportunistic adaptation of the neoliberal project (Peck and Theodore, 2012).

Austerity funding and street-level poverty work: Reconfiguring approaches to poverty

Austerity, or 'the cuts', has, for social care, meant the intended reduction of 900,000 UK public sector jobs between 2011 and 2018 (Oxfam, 2013:14) and major cutbacks to publicly funded social and welfare programmes. The House of Commons library estimates a £37bn expenditure reduction in working age social security between 2010 and 2021 (Butler, 2018). Social care funding cuts are not only transpiring to be a futile attempt to deliver promised economic growth, but are being linked to a startling increase in mortality rates, principally affecting the most vulnerable citizens (Watkins et al, 2017). Poverty finds expression in austerity politics in the reduction of funding and services for those experiencing poverty; a situation which compounds their marginalization. The total number of social care and support agencies have significantly fallen, and those that remain struggle with reduced human and financial resources. Austerity policies also create increasing levels of poverty: both the numbers in poverty have increased, alongside a worsening of the deprivation experienced by those who were already in poverty (Oxfam, 2013; Hills et al, 2015; JRF, 2016), notwithstanding a rise in 'in-work poverty' (Lansley and Mack, 2015). In this way, austerity policies further dismantle the welfare state which was established in the UK to avoid "those who are sick, disabled, old or unemployed from falling below a civilised standard of subsistence" (Townsend, 1962: 210). Whilst these attacks on entitlement are longstanding (Mead, 1997), austerity represents the rapid retrenchment of state expenditure on public services and 'the social', and, moreover, is suggestive of the "politically constructed content of the category poverty" (Green, 2006: 1122). To be sure, austerity policies act

as the current underlying political, social, economic and indeed normative framework in which the state (categorizes and) responds to its poorest citizens. This transformation in expenditure has far-reaching consequences for the way that poverty is approached in public policy, for citizens' experience of poverty, and for the 'street-level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 1980) working in these services.

Public, welfare and charity sector frontline workers carry the weight of discretionary decision-making (Zacka, 2017). Within limited resources of time, money and autonomy, they are 'trying their best' or just 'doing what they do' (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003), whilst continuously juggling competing demands (Watkins-Hayes, 2009; McCann et al, 2015) or 'vectors of concern' in case-based decision-making (Vohnsen, 2015). All the while aware they are perpetually positioned to experience 'redundancy, foreclosure, indignity' (Granter, 2009: 176) as the new precariat of contemporary capitalist work (Standing, 2011). As Watkins-Hayes (2009: 10) notes, in the US context, shifts in policy "gave welfare offices the opportunity to fundamentally shift their prevailing organizational models, and it provided the professionals who staff them the chance to alter how they conceptualize and organize their work". She continues, "how these bureaucrats understand themselves as professionals, and who they are and are *not* willing to be for the sake of the agency, its clients, and the surrounding community is paramount. It represents how they position the work that they do within the lives that they lead." (Watkins-Hayes, 2009: 24).

Up until the onset of austerity policies, a set of UK-based charities had been regular providers of contracted-out public services. To explore charity sector contracting and funding structures within the context of austerity politics and in terms of poverty, is to uncover a fundamental shift in the move away from public grants provided to these charities to address poverty, to poverty and 'the poor' as creators of profit. This move, understood in the context of a shift in funding structures, is driven by MDG strategies and capitalist-market rationales. By encouraging business intervention into areas where its presence was traditionally limited, rationales of competition and profit are inserted into the sector. Thus, in terms of austerity policies and the resultant charity-sector contracting, approaches to poverty are reconfigured by notions of profit, as poverty becomes a site for the production of capital (Adams, 2013) within the shifting 'alchemy of austerity' (Clarke and Newman, 2012). As we shall see below, this manifests itself via a competitive framework that financially subordinates charity to business, and the insertion of an ethos of private profit into charity work.

Establishing the business-charity divide

For du Gay (2003), the role of theory in UK public administration and related policies relies upon, and gives ultimate recourse to, an 'epochalist schema'. This is premised upon dichotomies of good and bad, new and old, and (recently) enterprise and bureaucracy (du Gay, 2000; Steger and Roy, 2010).

Such prescriptive dualities find expression in neoliberal policy reforms, from, for example, Osbourne and Gaebler's (1992) entrepreneurial governance, via the Conservative's 'reinvention' and through to New Labour's 'modernization' agendas (du Gay, 2003). Such dichotomies appear in the most recent shift of oppositional schema: from bureaucracy and enterprise; to – in the policies of 'super austerity' (Hastings and Gannon, 2016; Lowndes and Gardner, 2016) – charity and business.

Grant funding provided to public and charity organizations was effectively retracted soon after the instatement of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in 2010; displacing the funding and contracting structures many larger charities had, up until this point, relied upon. Early austerity rhetoric suggested that commercial business alongside charities, or 'the third sector', would be key players in the areas of care and welfare (Cameron, 2010). However, the charity sectors' position of prominence was never fully realised in practice. By 2015, with a Conservative administration in place, and 'super-austerity' firmly positioned, both the rhetoric of, and contracting privileges within, austerity shifted; away from charity's position, and towards viewing commercial business as the 'answer' (Milbourne and Murray, 2017). In this way, contracting and funding changes since austerity (alongside the accompanying rhetoric) established for the charity sector a business-charity divide. These structural and discursive shifts illustrated a functioning of the state-sanctioned model of MDG. In political 'spaces', and for the organization, business in opposition to charity became the current over-simplified and supposedly dichotomous categories that prescribe the terms of reference for change: from bad to good; from old to new; from charity to business. As du Gay (2003) suggests, missing from this debate is an analysis of milieu-specific cases with which to interrogate the reliance upon this epochal prism 'in action', so to speak.

After outlining the ethnographic case, the following section presents the data charting how competitive tendering structures - which increasingly include and advantage business - subordinate charity and charity work. I then turn to the manifestation of a capitalist-market logic of profit to explore its permeation in labour activities.

Instability in the charity: Obscuring an ethos of public care

The following account draws upon empirical data from 12 months ethnographic fieldwork, exploring the lived experience of austerity policies in one charity organization based in England. Charity organizations in the UK are a divergent collection of entities. This charity, operating outside of the usual citizen-donor system many UK charities rely upon (NCVO, 2011), represents a grouping of predominantly small to medium-sized charities that were, prior to the enactment of austerity, almost entirely sustained by local and national government grants. Historically this charity addressed poverty via environmental measures: regenerating local spaces, promoting active healthy living, and

increasing civic participation in the process. However, it had moved into delivering 'public' services within areas of education, health, employment, social care and criminal justice, via their awarding of annual public grant funds. It operates nationally via a federation structure with regional Trusts positioned to respond to local needs. Trusts work within some of the most deprived areas of the UK. I spent a year in one Trust both in participant and non-participant roles. The Trust employed the equivalent of twenty fulltime frontline staff. Frontline workers spent the majority of their time out of the office 'on projects'. Project work could be in schools, community groups, youth offending services, and geographical areas of the city experiencing chronic deprivation. Projects ranged from community consultation and physical regeneration of land or amenities for public use, to educational talks, or sessions as part of criminal justice rehabilitation programmes. I wrote notes of my observations daily, at times whilst on-site, and each evening developed the handwritten notes into detailed digital accounts. Thematic analysis occurring during data collection was approached as an iterative process, enabling the emergence of emic themes to occur. This was augmented 'post-fieldwork', with a focused analysis period, and writing assisted with interpretation. This empirical account focuses on the narratives of or about frontline workers. Recognizing the homogenizing tendencies of presenting such 'street-level bureaucrats' as a defined group (Vohnsen, 2015:157), nevertheless the case is constructed in order to "organiz[e] knowledge about reality in a manageable way" (Lund, 2014:224). The account begins by focusing upon the organizational response to shifts of austerity politics: policy shifts imbued with a logic of exaggerated dichotomy (du Gay, 2003) and competitive rationales of capitalist-markets, before moving on to the second major empirical theme: the permeation of an ethos of profit into workers' daily labour.

Competitive funding structures and the subordination of charity

Charities currently operate within a funding context uncharacteristic of the earlier structures in which they had resided. For this organization, and prior to austerity, around 90% of their annual funding was public money, awarded in grants. However, within a year of the introduction of austerity policies, public funding made up around 10% of their required annual income and was all competitively won. In response to the retraction of grant funding and the insertion of competitive contracting, the charity was obligated to ally with and compete against commercial businesses for the financing of their projects. Such alliances and competition appeared within a policy context, which progressively pitted charity against business, in contrast to early austerity rhetoric suggesting charity and business would coordinate via mutually supporting forms (Milbourne and Murray, 2017). Competitively tendered social care contracts were challenging to secure and even more difficult to finance. Therefore, to maintain project work, alternative funding was sought from commercial organizations motivated to pledge to charity work, often in order to satisfy corporate social responsibility aims. For this charity,

they were forced into a position of financial subordination by competitive funding structures in which business dominates. Manifest within the organization was a similar adoption of the valorisation of business at the expense of charity. For example, as a frontline worker Maria said:

- *"We have to stop acting like a charity and be sleeker in the way we present ourselves. This will win funding. Being a charity isn't a good thing anymore. Businesses have to see us as a credible partner. We've got to be polished and demonstrate business acumen. That appeals to them."*

The charity coveted the organizational form and practices of business, fostering a conviction that they must 'become' a business in order to keep on. The oppositional schema underpinning austerity policies and linked to the competitive funding environment, financially and organizationally subordinates charity to business. With charity no longer 'a good thing', and as a frontline worker Polly suggested, without the grant funding for charities, their viable option was to become a business:

- *"We hear 'We're not a charity...we don't get funding, so we are a business'. Essentially, we are a business. It's a big cultural shift."*

Competitive funding structures subordinate charity to business, thus enabling oppositional schemas to function within the organization. In this context, charity work, and the ethos of public care this is imbued with, also became a target for change, as John, the Executive Director revealed:

- *"[Frontline workers] have had to accept some big changes – not only operationally, but addressing their work habits that were slowing us down. We've had to look to the private sector for models of work. We've provided training to get [staff] to think differently about their work."*

These different approaches to charity work were promoted through training. This training was imbued with rationales of competition, and as Claire, a frontline worker said, staff began to be monitored to ensure they performed in these new practices, and did not 'slip back into old ways':

- *"We've done training in business working. We're being followed up on what we're doing differently to make sure we don't slip back into old ways. We can't get the grant funding like we did then. We have to phone people, do sales. It's very corporate."*

As we shall see in the next section, additional capitalist-market logics were inserted into the work. For the frontline staff this manifests as a permeation of profit in their daily labour.

"Accounting for every half hour": How profit concerns permeate workers' labour

The deficit left by the sudden retraction of funding meant that, for this charity, organizational priorities shifted towards 'turning a profit'. As Zoe, one of the managers said,

- *"The Trustees want to see the deficit gone and fifty-thousand pounds profit. The new Business Development team gets contracts that are turning a profit. The other delivery teams, that's the area of worry".*

New teams were established in the charity, focusing upon 'business development' and aiming to diversify their income into commercial business streams. These changes brought different organizational approaches to their finances. Pre-austerity, annual public grants were reviewed by government or council departments at the end of each financial year, with budgets reduced for the next if the full sum had not been used. It was common for a flurry of spending activity to occur in February and March to transfer any monetary surplus into supplies or services. The charity was not encouraged to deposit residual funds; instead spending whatever might be left on add-ons for projects or supplementary provisions for the communities. As John explained:

- *"If there was fifty-thousand pounds left at the end of the contract, everyone would be saying 'what can we spend it on?' No-one saw it as profit to put in the bank."*

This indicates how the organizational framework for approaching their finances changed with the establishment of monetary surplus as 'profit to put in the bank'. Profit soon became an individual concern with financial targets worked out for each frontline worker, as John explained:

- *"I'm confident we can get into a profit. We just need to bring in more business. Every person who is delivering needs to generate about fifteen-thousand [pounds] in profit above their costs".*

Profit was reframed as an individual concern, and to be created from work with the poor. This reframing inserts a new language of profit and 'chargeable hours' into the conditions of frontline charity work, Polly explained:

- *"Finance have worked out a fulltime person's hours for the year. They've taken off an average for sickness, holidays and training. They can say what each individual person could earn in those remaining hours. You're left with three hours a week that are not chargeable."*

Similarly, Claire told me:

- *"It's what we are accountable for now. We each have this financial target to hit. Management are putting the pressure on. It's going to reflect badly if we are doing a lot of hours on developmental work [which] takes time. These financial targets weren't there historically. Now we have to account for every half an hour of our time. We've been given guidelines for how*

much of what's not chargeable is absorbable. We'll have to keep a track of what we are doing so that management can see the type of projects that are a financial success."

Similarly, when Zoe discussed the expectations managers now have for workers, an ethos of profit was being fostered as each individual workers' responsibility:

- *"Every one of them needs to be bringing in more than their costs and overheads. We are focusing on driving a profit-margin per worker. They just need to build their confidence and develop their skills to go and maximise the business development opportunities. The only way we can keep on is if every person here is bringing in more than they're spending".*

As profit emerged as a key organizational and individual concern, frontline workers daily labour activities began to be permeated by rationales of profit. Claire described the pervasiveness of this concern:

- *"We have to show we are making money in everything we do. Over the past year it's been worked out for everyone to be profitable. We have our annual profit target for everybody, and for each of the teams. We talk about the money so much now. And we are asked to think about it at every stage of every project."*

Likewise, a frontline worker Carl talked about how the 'cultural shift' towards an ethos of profit was proving difficult for workers to navigate:

- *"It's not just the economic shift, it's the cultural shift that is massive. We had a lad who had done some fantastic work that communities are still benefitting from. He's saying 'why are management asking what my profit-margin is and how many billable hours I've got this month?' The lad just wanted to do his job."*

As an ethos of private profit seeped into the site we begin to see, as Carl revealed, a tension between this new concern and the traditional ways of working imbued with an ethos of public care.

Labours of negotiation in the production of charity work

The insertion of a logic of profit alongside the individual workers' responsibility to realize this, creates a divergent set of concerns from the ethos of care traditionally sanctioned by, and occurring within, charity work. Workers often experienced dissonance when demands conflicted, as, for example, Maria spoke of:

- *"The [plastic carrier bag] programme is not going as planned. We're not making enough money off it, which means that people are using plastic bags less. Our payment is less than we envisaged and the projects we were going to fund with it will struggle to be covered. It's hard*

when you're pulled in two directions. We should be glad that people are making more environmentally-friendly choices, but because of the way contracting is now, the money won't be coming in from it."

As grants were retracted, remaining government funding was accessed by competitive Payment by Results (PBR) contracting. The PBR funding context facilitates an environment that requires active and engaged negotiation. As Maria explained, successful environmental policies ought to be a celebratory outcome for those working in an environmental organization. However, payments were less than expected to the charity. Workers recognized that reduced payment from these contracts would affect their capability to organize and fund other local projects as planned, and were therefore 'pulled in two directions'. Within the PBR funding context, there were incongruities between focusing upon what workers deemed was needed or would be beneficial, and the attaining of targets in order to get paid and thus create a surplus for other project work. In this way, workers were contending with divergent concerns, as Luke, a manager, revealed:

- *"My first experience with PBR we made too many mistakes. Compliance would come in and every time we got a massive bollocking. Emotionally it was very difficult. We had employed youth workers who didn't want to do tokenistic work where they lead these young people up the garden path towards work, when they need to think about their weed-smoking first. It was brutal and unrealistic; caseloads were really high and [frontline workers] were struggling. They had upwards of a hundred and twenty on their caseloads because they were actually trying to work with these people, and still had them on their caseload six months later."*

As Luke suggested, at times public care outcomes collided with financial motives inserted into the funding context. For these workers, they began to experience restrictive expectations placed upon their labour in the form of outcomes which they were measured against, and for which payments to the charity were either given or withheld depending upon workers' achievements of these targets. As Luke explained, professionals with experience of the multiplicity of adversities sustaining these young people as vulnerable, were attempting to address areas of need in their work that would have more beneficial or holistic care outcomes. Still, payment rested upon 'tokenistic work' to achieve an employment outcome, which they as professionals deemed inappropriate. As Luke said, these workers generated excessively high caseloads 'because they were actually trying to work with these people'. This jostling of ethics meant that in order to uphold an ethos of public care, workers in this instance negotiated these demands by taking on increasing amounts of work, wherein, ultimately, competing expectations created 'brutal and unrealistic' working conditions.

Whilst out on a competitively won public project in which private business were partnered with local communities to part-fund and oversee the establishment of allotments for growing food, Maria spoke of the practical ways workers negotiated competing demands and maintained an ethos of care:

- *"The businesses refused to provide food. To expect people on benefits to do a day of physical labour without additional calorie intake is quite unreasonable. I've been taking them biscuits because with unemployed people now, they're all starving, they can't afford to make a lunch. One of the guys bought himself a kettle and a gas burner and they were like 'Oh good for you.' Well no, they should have paid for that. If they want an output, they need to put a bit more in. They need to put some love into it."*

In an echo of literatures on street-level bureaucracy, discretionary decision-making was undertaken by workers in their daily activities. As Maria suggested, workers approach each instance via the particularities of its circumstance (Vohnsen, 2015), and, despite the delimiting logics that now permeate their work, they respond to need in whatever way they can. This suggests that whilst confined by new logics, workers were, at times, sustaining a traditional public care approach to those in poverty. Concerns with profit, and the performance monitoring introduced to foster and audit this concern, function to push the work that maintains an ethos of care out of sight. These measuring tools, usually introduced under the auspice of efficiency and, under such terms, the necessity of transparency, here instead occlude work being undertaken to maintain the traditional purpose of the charity and the ethic traditionally sanctioned within this role.

Additionally, Polly suggested the dissonance or 'conflicts' workers experience whilst trying to square new concerns with the traditional interests of the charity, impose an act of balancing which they must navigate:

- *"We need to be really careful we don't lose the whole point of what we are. There is this conflict and we have to try to balance between who we are and what we are wanting to do. We have to try and work that out."*

In the 'working out' of the conflicts, this balancing was understood as either distending the ethos of the charity or as the individual workers' responsibility to 'develop', as Alan, a manager revealed:

- *"Because it's money driven, the vision, the mission, the ethos will all change. If we had the money we wouldn't have bid for some of the stuff. So making money becomes the driver more than the ethos of a charitable service. In going forward, it has to be stretched. It's like with Polly; she's been to uni and studied as an environmentalist. We are now saying 'you need to*

go out and sell this'. In that case then, it's got to be about expanding the person if you don't want to expand the ethos."

Alan explained the tension inherent in 'going forward': either stretch the ethos of the charity, or opt to expand the persona of the individual worker. In this way, workers bear the responsibility of maintaining a charitable or public care ethos whilst navigating the interplay of divergent ethics.

Part of the way these labours of negotiation were enacted were through deliberate discursive prompts of the ethos underpinning their work. Claire explained that reminding others in the organization of 'who we are' was an important tool for sustaining the 'culture' of charity work:

- *"Culture is important to us. A lot of us who have been here longer are actively trying to remind [others] that it's important. We've been here through the changes and still think of ourselves as a community-focused charity because our funding used to come to do that work. We need to keep hold of that. It's about who we are."*

Discussion

As du Gay (2003) suggests, the rhetorical device upon which much debate and theory around public sector reform relies, is determined via an exaggerated logic of opposition. Within policy forums, charity and business have, over the course of austerity, been progressively divided, and business eventually prized. The retraction of government grant funding and its partial replacement with competitive PBR structures cements these positions. As businesses dominate financially, charity and charity work are subordinated structurally, organizationally and individually. The organizational manifestation of the dichotomous narrative that austerity policies rely upon, emerges as both a response to, and a part of, the changes to the politically-driven and economic context of charity funding. As competitive market-based structures replace those of grant funding, we find an organizational-level manifestation (in the prizing of business over charity) as stipulated in austerity policy and in the perpetuation of oppositional approaches to public reform (Ibid). These accounts suggest dichotomies of reform narratives are manifest within this organizational site; as 'charity' is positioned as oppositional to business, and ultimately is devalued in the zero-sum conception such binary logics dictate. The oppositional narrative, manifest within the organizational move from charity to business, indicates what is at stake when oversimplified dichotomies play out.

A political and socioeconomic reconfiguration of approaches to poverty is enacted within new funding structures imbued with market-driven logics of competition and profit. In this charity, an ethos of profit permeates workers' daily concerns and profitmaking is framed as their individual responsibility. Activity to stimulate competitive advantage, alongside workers adopting individual commercial

business behaviours, are appraised. Moreover, instead of 'simply' *addressing* poverty, they are now, individually, expected to *create profit* from it, thus being a part of the political and socioeconomic reconfiguration of approaches to poverty (Adams, 2013).

Whilst profit does indeed permeate charity work, the detail in the ethnography demonstrates the complexities that remain within, and indeed are inherent to, frontline labour within this changed condition of contemporary capitalist work. Exploring where an ethos of profit jostles or intersects with an ethos of care indicates the 'street-level' negotiations taking place in order to navigate the zone between these abstractions. In this regard, these findings offer hope that a reconfiguration of poverty by way of the insertion of profit is not happening uniformly within the relational interactions at the street-level, and indeed, is more complex than this. These labours of negotiation ultimately impede a reconfiguring of poverty into profit entirely. Perhaps then, there is a limit to the reach of logics and rationales of capitalist-markets, yet this seems to fall to the workers themselves to buffer a complete enactment of these logics at the individual site. The discretionary production of charity work in the space between two colliding ethics is symptomatic of the labours of negotiation these charity workers repeatedly engage in. They act to buffer capitalist-market logics and an ethos of private profit from their fulfilment within 'local' and situated understandings of poverty and in terms of an ethos of public care. Responsibility for both upholding an ethos of public care whilst acquiring an ethos of private profit indicates the weight of navigating this interplay. When considered in the context of a political socioeconomic reconfiguration of poverty via notions of profit, these findings suggest where the limits of binary oppositions might be enacted and even who, perhaps, authorizes these thresholds.

Street-level workers will undertake considerable effort to engage in discretionary activity when they deem it necessary or just (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003). The literature tells us that discretion matters in the delivery of public policy. These findings suggest how discretion might be employed tactically in order to maintain an ethos of public care that historically imbued charity work. In this way, discretion here is not simply a tool that interferes with policy aims, but one that can be employed to retain the traditional task of the organization, and the ethic underpinning that role. Yet, navigating the individual burden of this work is being pushed out of organizational sight. Through these labours of negotiation, a reconfiguration of poverty is blocked from being fully enacted in the simplified oppositional way, by the everyday situated work of the frontline workers in this charity. Or, perhaps these findings are indicative of the organizational processes of 'subtly replacing' these ethics (Adams, 2013). In any case, this disruptive force of labour perhaps indicates the capabilities of individual actors in affecting political decision-making (Touraine, 2001), particularly if one accepts frontline workers are the 'human face of policy' (Lipsky, 1980).

Conclusion

Via the move from grant funding to address poverty, to structures that insert capitalist-market logics of competition and profit into the charity sector, poverty becomes a driver of profit and hence approaches to poverty are politically and socioeconomically reconfigured via these rationales. As charity is increasingly subordinated to business, the oppositions embedded in both austerity politics' rhetoric and its funding structures become realized operationally and within worker roles. The charity must compete with and work alongside commercial businesses, whilst they mirror their structures and 'become' a business, as an ethos of private profit permeates labour activities.

In order to navigate political, sector and organizational binaries, workers engage in labours of negotiation. In the situated everyday work, the complexities of the production of their labour creates a movement within (or perhaps outside of) the binary terms of reference. Whilst the business-charity divide retains organizational purchase, there is a complex navigation of the poverty-profit interplay which surrounds and permeates their work. Discretionary activity often emerges in the strategies that workers employ to achieve their targets (Brodkin, 2001). Here it functions as a strategy to maintain an ethos of public care; one that was traditionally sanctioned in their work, but that seems devalued in the context of the primacy (and measurement) of new profit-focused concerns. This work is, at times, pushed out of organizational sight.

This paper has illuminated the significance of what is at stake when capitalist-market logics are ubiquitously (and inappropriately) inserted into public care sites. If charity, charity work and its associated public care ethic is progressively 'lost' to business, a crucial safeguarding mechanism is threatened; one that is needed evermore in UK social-citizenry spaces and the ways that poverty is understood and acted upon in austerity UK. Focusing upon 'local' measures implemented as a strategy of MDG (Varga, 2016) enables the social and political relations involved in these processes to be foregrounded. Tracing political and rhetorical dimensions of oppositional schemas in policy suggests these are enacted via structural and funding mechanisms which subordinate charity to business. Transposing this frame to uncover the organizational and discursive reformatting of charity, understood entirely in opposition to business, this paper has, therefore, repositioned du Gay's (2003) theoretical analysis of public reform policy and its reliance upon dualistic oppositions, into alternative empirical and analytical conditions, namely into charitable organizational settings. Whilst du Gay (Ibid) identifies the delimiting nature of binary distinctions at the political site and heeds caution of scholarly acceptance of trading in these terms, this paper suggests what is at stake when oversimplified dichotomies are recruited organizationally and rhetorically employed.

This paper adds to Watkins-Hayes' social group and identity membership work. Where Watkins-Hayes (2009: 86) is "attempting to connect these seemingly random discretionary practices and styles to workers' professional identities in order to highlight how these events are patterned, strategic, systemic and socially constructed", this paper brings in the dynamic of an ethos and its functioning across political, social, personal and role domains. As Brodtkin (2001: i255) asserts, "It is discretion that gives street-level practitioners the ability to adapt to changes in policy and management". Perhaps further exploring the discretionary navigation of competing ethics might begin to uncover what contributes to the enactment of these labours of negotiation.

Finally, the paper has added to the work of Adams (2013) by developing an analysis of how far an ethos of private profit has *replaced* an ethos of public care in charity work under austerity policies. This is indeed occurring, or as Adams suggests *has occurred*, at the site of structural, political and socioeconomic approaches to poverty (or, as in her case, where citizens were undoubtedly failed by actions informed by MDG in the wake of Hurricane Katrina). We know that in ecological disaster circumstances capitalist-market logics fail citizens (Adams, *Ibid*). Importantly, this paper concludes that whilst new logics are indeed inserted into this 'space', workers in this charity are themselves navigating these demands and, in different ways, are engaging in labours of negotiation in order to maintain an ethos of public care. This paper therefore suggests that in socioeconomic conditions of crisis, the burden of care that was once conferred via the role is in some way decoupled from its 'office' through the measurement of other concerns, and the associated delimiting of this ethic. Instead, it is the personal, social and political (as opposed to the organizational or professional) roles that authorizes the individual workers still remain congruous to the principles and ethics of this type of citizen-focused charity work.

With frontline workers carrying the weight of discretionary decision-making (Zacka, 2017), further work is needed to explore the individual effects of sustaining a public care ethic and in terms of the labours of negotiation currently being envisaged, enacted and endured to do so in the charity sector. Whilst operating for now (or at least in this site, at the time of this research), the reliance upon workers to block a full enactment of a reconfiguration of poverty into profit seems to depend upon recognition of, and active commitment to, an ethos of public care. However, if neoliberal structures of market-driven governance progressively delimit arrangements of charity and charity work and "Accountability measures and the formalization of procedures exert continuous tension on the discretionary power of street-level bureaucrats" (Watkins-Hayes, 2009: 85), then perhaps envisaging, enacting and enduring this commitment will become an increasingly challenging condition for those working in the UK charity sector.

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