The Evolution of Housing

The Evolution of Housing:

Using History to Transform the Future

By

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To Jacqui, my wife, without whose support this book would not have been completed.

Note: The author is responsible for any textual flaws, while his opinions represent personal and subjective views of the historical interpretation of events described and assessed.

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SECTION 1

GENERAL REMARKS, THEORETICAL ISSUES AND STRUCTURAL OUTLINE

> "It was resolved to comprehend the real world – nature and history – just as it presents itself to everyone who approaches it free from pre-conceived idealist fancies" (Engels describing the materialist standpoint) (Engels, 1886, 451).

> "Human progress can only be measured by the actual advances, the real gains, the concrete improvements achieved by humanity" (Nizan, 1971, 131).

General remarks

The quotes that preface this section represent the two pillars on which this book is based. The first pillar enables the reader to understand, from a historical perspective, what factors drive change within housing; this will focus on the social rented housing sector though the private housing sector will be covered, as appropriate.[1]

The second pillar enables the reader to evaluate, critically, how effective housing policy developments have been historically and to use this

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[1] The term "public sector" housing denotes traditionally housing that is state controlled such as local authority housing; it has also been used in respect of the housing association sector. In Scotland, such bodies are generally referred to as social landlords, as defined in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, s. 165: "Social landlord" means a registered social landlord, local authority landlord or a local authority which provides housing services and the housing stock that they manage is referred to as "social housing". Both phrases are used in the book.

knowledge to inform a strategy for future change.[2] So it is important to recall the philosophical point made by Marx that:

"The philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways; the point however is to change it" (Marx, 1942a, 473).

Although the book covers housing developments in the United Kingdom, the book focusses on Scotland.

Finally, the book is intended to be of an inter-disciplinary nature and particular sections will describe broader historical events to illustrate key points. These cover both housing and non-housing specific issues.

Theoretical issues

This section outlines specific theoretical issues central to understanding the evolution and development of housing law and related policy. These are: the relationship between the economic structure of society and ideology; essentialism; social class; systems theory; structured omission; language use and promoting equality through housing law; and the legacy of imperialism in relation to housing.

The relationship between the economic structure of society and ideology

The social relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of economic development was described by Marx as constituting the economic structure of society (Marx, 1942b, 356).[3] This is the real foundation of society on which arises legal and political superstructure; this superstructure evolves continually as the material forces of production

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[2] Strategy refers to an overall plan of action which aims to achieve a set goal (or goals); the term is derived from the Greek 'strategia', generalship, and its noun is 'strategem,' a cunning plan. So, the term is rooted in military planning (Tulloch, 2005, 166).

[3] As Misik, 2010, 134, writes: "…there is no better way to learn to think than by reading Marx" whose lasting greatness rests on the methodology he created to understand social processes. In the original German, the text reads: „Es gibt keine bessere Weise, denken zu lernen, als Marx zu lesen".

in society change, that is, the economic base.[4] It is also critical to remember that the economic base comprises both the forces of production and the social relations of those involved in the actual productive processes. Harman, 1998, 28, explains this further by commenting that the "forces of production exert pressure on the existing relations of production. And those in turn come into conflict with the existing superstructure".[5]

Although the economic base is of fundamental importance, the superstructure is critical, too, as regards historical development. Indeed, Engels states in a letter to Joseph Bloch, that ultimately the determining element in history is the economic base (the production and reproduction of society in real life) but:

"More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. If therefore someone twists this into the statement that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase" (Engels,1890, 381).

Engels then emphasises that the superstructural elements such as political and legal forms and their constituent ideas also influence historical struggles (developments). Within the confines of historical materialism, indeed, both the economic base and its corresponding superstructure change and evolve continuously through time – their relationship is dialectical. In short: the boundary between these categories is neither static nor fixed, with both elements inter-dependent and inter-active.

Nor should it be forgotten that changes in superstructural forms, such as legislative change, are rarely a harmonious process and individual laws, when enacted, are often a compromise to assuage varying social class interests, used to stabilise a spectrum of class interests inherent in contemporary capitalist society.

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[4] In the case of housing, housing law evolves continually to reflect the economic requirements of changes within capitalism.

[5] Harman, 1998, 28, notes that the distinction between base and superstructure should not be regarded as a simple distinction between one set of institutions and another. It is fundamentally "a distinction between relations that are directly connected with production and those that are not".

One good legislative example of this is the Housing (Homeless) Persons Act 1977.[6] During the debates on the original Bill, as introduced as a Private Member's Bill to the House of Commons by Stephen Ross - Liberal MP for the Isle of Wight - opposition to the Bill arose from local authorities and individual Members of Parliament (MPs) despite all party support for its underlying policy.[7] MPs opined, for instance, that the Bill would provide the undeserving poor with a right to council housing.[8] As Robson and Poustie, 1996, 44, point out, one such view was that:

"Hordes of displaced miscreants from the hinterlands of Britain and abroad, it was said, would descend on seaside resorts and areas which had major seaports, airport and rail termini clamouring to be rehoused".[9]

Opposition came from MPs of different parties with notable criticisms being voiced by Rees-Davies and Hugh Rossi.[10] Rees-Davies argued that the proposed provisions would benefit rent dodgers, that is, those people who are evicted and then present themselves as homeless to local authorities.[11] While Hugh Rossi opined that giving homeless people a right to housing would disadvantage people on housing lists and lead to queue-jumping[12] (Loveland, 1995, 71).

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[6] This Act came into force in England and Wales on the 1 December 1977 and the 1 April 1978 in Scotland (Robson and Poustie,1996, 46).

[7] See Robson and Poustie, 1996, 43-46, for information on the difficulties that beset the passage of the Bill.

[8] The undeserving poor were those deemed responsible for their poverty. See Fraser, 2017, for information about how the concepts of deserving and undeserving poor were integrated into the British Welfare State.

[9] When the author worked in Wigan with Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council between 1978 and 1980, one of his colleagues – the Homeless Person's Officer in Blackpool – explained that some families from Glasgow did in fact present as homeless to Blackpool Council at September weekends (a traditional Glasgow holiday). But this is quite different from suggesting, like the quote above, that hordes from Scotland wanted to live in England; rather, it was just a few canny folk 'savvy' enough to use the law to support their holiday plans.

[10] Rees-Davies was the Conservative MP for Thanet, while Hugh Rossi was the Conservative MP for Hornsey.

[11] Robson and Poustie , 1996, 44, note how the local authority lobby attacked the Housing (Homeless Persons) Bill as a "Scroungers' Charter".

[12] Criticism was often racist in nature such as Hugh Rossi's comments that the Bill could result in making extra resources being made available to the 'Paddy O'Conners of this world'" (Loveland, 1995, 71).

Analysis of superstructural elements can provide fruitful insight into changes taking place within capitalism, including changes to its economic base and to existing social relations. Evaluation of housing law will, therefore, be kernel to subsequent Chapters to illustrate, not only how law is modified by economic and related political concerns, but how law itself modifies social relations within capitalist society.[13] This will also necessitate assessing housing policy which is the medium through which law is reflected in practice.[14] Included in this assessment will be commentary on how law serves to minimise potential and/or actual class conflict to maintain the economic stability of capitalist society. One effect of this process, of course, is that housing law may run counter to the interests of particular social classes.

Social class

The term social class is often presented in academic texts in a way that shadows its true nature. Lund, 2017, 233-234, for example, refers to Marx using a two-class model, namely the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. He then cites other approaches, for example, the approach taken by Savage, 2015. Savage categorises social class into seven distinct groups, for instance, the lowest group referred to as the "Precariat." Indeed, only one of the seven groups refers to the "traditional working-class".[15] These comments are inadequate, however, as well as obfuscating the nature of social class. First, then, let us highlight the inadequacy of Lund's comment.

Although Marx does refer to the two groups above, he was clearly aware of the evolving nature of class society. To cite Marx (brackets added by the author):

"The owners merely of labour power (workers), owners of capital (capitalists), and landowners…constitute the three big classes of modern society based upon the capitalist mode of production" (Marx, 1894, 885).

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[13] For example, we will see how, in relation to housing, society has been transformed in the United Kingdom from one dominated by private rented housing to a society in which owner occupation has become the main housing tenure.

[14] At least at the macro level. For, at organisational level, policies may not always reflect legal provisions accurately.

[15] The Savage distinction of capital as comprising three forms (economic, cultural and social) is highly debateable as it is difficult to see how cultural and social elements could ever constitute capital.

So, three classes are postulated, not just two. But Marx goes further.

For example, Marx stresses that, in England, the "stratification of classes does not appear in its pure form"; while "Middle and intermediate strata even here obliterate lines of demarcation everywhere" (Marx, 1894, 885).

Marx then raises the issue as to whether other social groups might themselves comprise separate classes, for example, physicians and officials before adding that this might also apply to the three "big classes" above due to their ongoing fragmentation.[16]

In short, this is a clear indication of the insight Marx possessed when considering the possible evolution of classes within capitalism.

Social class is complex, then, and it is not possible to predict what Marx might have concluded if his analysis had not been time restricted. But it is important to make the following points.[17]

Firstly, although the working-class might "splinter" into separate social groups by virtue of income and access to other goods (commodities) such as housing, this does not alter their basic economic and social standing as workers who sell their labour-power to capitalists or rent properties from landowners.[18] Interestingly, Koram, 2023, 15-16, makes it clear that awareness of one's actual class may arise rather belatedly as economic reality comes to the fore. To cite Koram: "Doctors, barristers, professors and pilots are finding out now (2023), rather belatedly, that they too are workers and the lowering of labour conditions across the board will not leave them untouched".

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[16] This text derives from the section on Classes whose manuscript breaks off just after Marx raises this issue (Marx,1894, Chapter L11 (Classes).

[17] For general discussions about social class, see Marshall, 1950, and Cannadine,1998. An interesting commentary on Marx's views on class is provided by Fischer, 1973, 70, who writes: "Marx was not a lover of rigid formulas. He was an observer who never overlooked the individual and the specific in his search for general trends of social development. He did not view the crystallization of classes, highly resistant and effective social transformations that they are, as a process tending towards a standstill. He always endeavoured to grasp it by taking into account the totality of its definitions".

[18] As Damer, 1989, 169, notes: "…the working-class is not homogeneous. It is split by gender, race and religion, not to mention occupational skill and 'respectability'".

Secondly, at no point does Marx suggest, that working-class people – even if they move into separate social groups - are no longer working-class.[19] This is quite a different perspective from the Savage schema that fails to emphasise the unifying element particular to all seven groups, that is, they are all examples of working-class people.

Thirdly - and developing the point above - the terminology used by Savage is opaque and serves to obfuscate class relations, as reflected by the fact that only one of his seven groups refers to the working-class. Examples of opaque terminology are his social categories "new affluent workers" and "precariat". Do such groups even exist?

Finally, schema such as this tend to make readers perceive themselves, not as working-class, but as belonging to the categories illustrated. An offshoot of this is, of course, to divide working-class people by blinding them to the reality that that they are working-class people. And such disunity acts as an impediment to social and historical change. For people can only begin to change things in pursuance of their common interests if they understand reality, including the social class to which they belong.[20]

Henceforth, then, the term "working-class" will be used to denote people who require to sell their labour power to make a living – or potentially in the case of people who cannot obtain employment, for whichever reason. This has the merit of accepting that working-class people may be stratified across different social groupings but their status as workers is aligned to social and economic reality.

Essentialism

Dawkins, 2005, 317, states that there "is no such thing as essence". His statements before this are tantamount to a critique of Plato whose philosophy he argues inspired the development of essentialism. Dawkins

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[19] This is fundamental and a point to which any person of the so-called "established middle class" such as housing staff (or teachers) would attest if they were to go without their salary for several months but still had to pay their normal outgoings (mortgage, living costs, credit payments and so on).

[20] This is an important point as one's class relationship to other people is not simply based on their perception, but on the substance of these relations. In short: even if people do not regard themselves as being working-class, this does not alter their social relations as workers within capitalism.

raises this by reference to Plato's theory of forms which is exemplified in the statement that actual and particular things of this life are but "imperfect versions of an ideal archetype of their kind", for example, individual rabbits are imperfect copies of the form of the ideal and perfect rabbit (Dawkins, 2005, 317).[21] Dawkins suggests that this led to the view that species have immutable essences which entails that no species "can ever give rise to another".

Dawkins then points out that no evolutionist thinks that modern species can change into another modern species, but that historically different species evolved from original creatures capable of interbreeding, a tenet that is central to the core biological meaning of species. And - Dawkins' key point - attempting to separate individual species would be a doomed enterprise if "all the intermediates were still alive".[22]

But this perspective does not represent essentialism correctly.[23] Scientific essentialism promotes the view that natural kinds - separate species of animals for example – can be distinguished objectively due to differences in their essential natures. These differences are ontological, not determined by social convention, but by intrinsic differences. It is not appearance, then, but real natures that guide our drawing of species lines in the world, and our knowledge of those lines is a vital element in our ability to say what a particular thing is. Indeed, entities such as human beings or society

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[21] The distinction between universal terms and particulars is an important philosophical theme. For example, the universal term "house" is used, in Scotland, to denote a sort of thing, but not actual particular houses. Another way to consider this issue and avoid postulating – as Plato did - the existence of a separate and unique form is to consider these terms linguistically as opposed to ontologically. Thus, to understand the universal term "house", we only need to know what an individual house is: the universal is understood through the particular. See Russell, 1961, for a general overview of both Platonism and the complex history of universals and their relationship to particulars; and Gosling, 1975, for detailed commentary on Plato's later views about the forms in the Philebus.

[22] The point being, of course, that all life forms are inter-connected, forming a spectrum of life.

[23] Meikle, 1985, 9, explains that the different methodological approaches is the difference "between those, on the one hand, who think that there are organic wholes with real natures and necessities (the essentialists and organicists), and those on the other who think there are no (knowable?) essences (the atomists, 'empiricists', anti-essentialists) together with those who think maybe there are essences, or maybe there probably are…".

are wholes with real essences "which we can and do come to know more about through our observation, investigation and analysis" (Meikle, 1985, 159).[24]

Essentialism is, as such, the philosophy that recognises that things have natures that can be discovered through empirical investigation (Meikle, 1985, 177). Thus, creatures such as dogs and cats have distinct natures that make them what they are, for example, puppies and kittens have the potential to become either dogs or cats (accidents excepted), nothing else. This latter point is fundamental to understanding that "certain sorts of change belong to the essence" (Meikle, 1985, 160). In short: things, due to their inherent natures, can only evolve in certain ways. And, as Ellis, 2001, 177, notes, "If you are a scientific essentialist, then you must believe that the laws of nature are grounded in the properties and structures of things".

And essentialist perspectives may be applied in the sphere of social science too (Meikle,1985). Indeed, it is a contention of this book that essentialism may be applied to organisational entities within capitalism, including social housing organisations which must evolve in specific ways given their nature within broader capitalist society.

For example, the activities of housing associations in Glasgow in their early phases were, prima facie, essentially developmental in nature, that is, associations were organisations that primarily carried out capital works such as modernisation programmes, as opposed to, say, housing management. The underlying essence of such organisations was, however, housing management (as shaped by law) as development activities involved the creation, through time, of a housing stock that required to be managed and maintained. This essence only became visible when associations evolved into their mature form as housing management organisations. Indeed, Meikle, 1995, 96, notes how a thing's nature is

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[24]   As well as misconstruing scientific essentialism, Dawkins appears simultaneously to be endorsing a central tenet of essentialism, namely, that things can only be as their DNA permits. To cite Dawkins, 2005, 317: "Cats don't turn into dogs and vice versa". Precisely, and this is because they have different natures as reflected in their genetic structure.

often seen by considering it in "its mature form", not in its embryonic form.[25]

Another important aspect of essentialism involves recognition that individual things – and their essences – cannot be properly understood in isolation. As Meikle notes:

"If something is part of a larger whole, as an eye is of a whole organism, then that is part of its essential nature, and we need to know more than its physical character in order to know what it is, i.e. its essence" (Meikle, 1985, 158).

And this can be applied, too, to social organisations since organisations do not operate in isolation, but as part of a broader economic and social system. Organisational essences can, in consequence, only be understood by reference to the broader system of which they are part. Thus, understanding organisational essence requires understanding of how organisations function within contemporary capitalist society and, critically, how they promote the objectives of social policy fostered by that society.

The essentialist methodology differs in kind from atomistic and empiricist-based approaches. Atomistic approaches propose that the world can be broken down into an ontology of simples, of basic building-blocks lacking complexity, to which everything else is reducible (Meikle, 1985, 154). Essentialist ontology, on the other hand, stresses that things are complex wholes that cannot simply be reduced to constituent parts, albeit that the whole comprises all these parts. Returning to the example above, an eye cannot function apart from the general physiology of which it is part.

Of what relevance, then, is essentialism to the development of housing law and related housing policies? Essentialism, it is advocated in this book, is critical, theoretically, for identifying the nature and role of housing organisations within capitalism.[26] As we shall see, the function of local

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[25] The actualisation of the underlying organisational potential might be prevented, of course, due to circumstance. In the example above, for instance, early housing associations may have failed to achieve their potential, say, through bankruptcy or mismanagement.

[26] Ellis, 2001, 178, postulates, though, that social sciences differ from physical sciences insofar as they are not subject to the laws of nature.

authorities and housing associations is the implementation of law and regulatory standards.[27] For example, Cotterrell, 1992, 58, notes how legislative strategies for promoting social change is emblematic of social policy in Britain with the law used "to promote change through the creation of new legal duties for existing administrative authorities".

It is stressed that the essentialist theoretical framework is not synonymous with arguing that natural kinds and their essences cannot evolve. Indeed, essentialism, as a theory, does not exclude historical evolution of DNA (or social form). Thus, an original essence can change into something of a different kind. For instance, animals of the same species can (and do) evolve into separate species when separated in time and place and must adapt to new environmental conditions. Similarly, the nature of capitalism is subject to continual change as it evolves to try and "survive" in the modern world.[28] And, with reference to social landlords, their essence can and does change as law changes.

See Table 1 which serves to provide the reader with useful theoretical information, including examples to clarify specific concepts.

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[27] Indeed, there has been increasing politicisation and juridification of relations since the 1980s between central Government and local authorities/other social landlords (Stewart, 1996; Loveland, 1995).

[28] Capitalism may not survive, of course, and society might "transition" into a new societal form (or essence) such as socialism or communism.

Table 1: Explanation of key concepts

Empiricism	Atomism	Essentialism	Organicism (systems theory)	Capitalism	Housing organisations
Knowledge derived from knowledge sense data*	Specific bits of knowledge**	Those aspects that make something what it is***	Organicism is a rich concept that recognises that everything in nature is linked****	The current economic system, based on the money commodity, but which has not always existed	These too have an essence: "creatures of statute" whose function (ergon) is to implement a diverse range of laws.*****

(**Source**: Compiled by the author)

Comments
* Hume and Kant etc; physical or epistemological.
** Analysing wholes into parts, not seeing how the whole comes from the particular.
*** A baby has the potential to become an adult human due to its DNA structure. The human DNA means that a baby cannot grow into a cat as its essence is that of a human being (essence can also be described as the body plan of each living organism). Societies too have essences which can be discovered by experience/research. The essence of capitalism is maximisation of profit or surplus value generated primarily through wage labour (the sale of labour power to capitalists). This differs from the previous social form from which capitalism evolved, namely feudalism whose economic system was not based on wage labour but bonded labour. This example also illustrates the potential for essences to evolve. Indeed, capitalism has evolved in form from early craft and guild forms through industrialisation, monopoly capitalism etc. But capitalism cannot evolve into any form of society "it chooses". For societal evolution is determined by a complex range of inter-dependent economic and political systems, including the role of social classes (the personal factors) in effecting change.
**** Scientific studies of evolution now demonstrate that present life forms have evolved from elementary bacteria of single cells. All life is thus inter-connected based on essence (chemical and organic substance) with all forms being generated from original particular life forms.
***** Housing associations are now increasingly vehicles of the private finance sector to which banks lend money to generate financial returns through interest rates. Laws cover their main functions: allocations; estate management; repairs and management; rent arrears management; property management (common factoring); equality and human rights issues; the development function (procurement law etc).

Systems theory

It is important, from a practical perspective, to align the essentialist perspective to an organisational model that enables a holistic approach to an assessment of organisational practice in housing. This approach is systems theory which, it is emphasised, has various theoretical versions covering diverse subjects.[29] One major exponent of general system theory was Bertalanffy,1969, 89, who developed this methodology in riposte to the mechanistic biological procedure that envisaged "living organisms into parts and partial processes", in short, empiricist methodology.

Bertalanffy, 1969, 38, argued that reality comprises layers of inter-dependent and inter-acting parts, or systems that "are sets of elements standing in interrelation". This approach is now referred to as general system theory, a general science of "wholeness" that recognises the interdependence of social phenomena.

Systems theory may be applied to a variety of disciplines such as mathematics, psychology and – of particular interest for this book – to social science, including housing. In organisational development research, for example, the open systems approach has developed in recent years, an approach that views organisations holistically, inextricably linked to the broader environment, that is, capitalist society in which they operate. For instance, Burnes, 2004, highlights that, common to the systems approach, is the requirement to structure organisational functions so that "business objectives are collectively pursued. The emphasis is on achieving overall synergy, rather than on optimising the performance of any one individual part per se" (Mullins, 1989; cited in Burnes, 2004, 265).

Failure to adhere to a systemic approach may, therefore, lead to organisational failures – within a competitive environment - including failure to implement change effectively. For, as Martin, 2006, highlights, understanding organisations as systems is insufficient to ensure effective change; it is imperative to identify the essential relationships between systems (organisational functions) and omit inessential ones.[30] In the case

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[29] See Parsons, 1951, Luhmann, 2004; and Seddon, 2008, in particular for information about systems theory in public sector housing.

[30] An analogy can perhaps be drawn here from the realm of science where it is now known that:

of social landlords, this requires not only a clear understanding of law and regulatory matters, but also organisational understanding of how this law is to translated effectively throughout organisations into practice.

Structured omission

Marx and Engels, 1932, 64-65 postulate that:

> "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force", then later "hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch".

And, as Parenti explains, 1998, 149, this is often achieved in contemporary society through media manipulation. In his words:

> "The built-in biases of the corporate media faithfully reflect the dominant ideology, seldom straying into territory that might cause discomfort to those who hold political and economic power, including those who own the media or advertise in it".[31]

It is of critical importance that people understand the accuracy of ideas that are presented to them, in particular given increasing levels of disinformation to the public (Edwards and Cromwell, 2018; Molyneux, 2011).[32] This becomes increasingly difficult if state authorities (people in power) make

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"About half of human DNA consists of multiple copies of meaningless sequences" (Dawkins, 2005, 132). To understand what genes are critical to bodily functions, one has to understand what DNA networks are relevant.

[31] Although Parenti is describing the USA, these principles apply to the United Kingdom toos Interestingly, Parenti used the terms "suppression by omission" to denote structured omission thus highlighting how language use may differ at the continental level. He also describes clearly other forms of social control through the media by reference to concepts such as labelling in which negative views may be presented of opponents (of capitalism) or framing whereby the truth is bent through diverse techniques, including levels of exposure and the tone of presentation.

[32] As Molyneux, 2011, 12, emphasises, the media is "profoundly politically, socially, ideologically and culturally biased…" and this applies "…to all of the media everywhere!"

use of structured omission.[33] At its basic level, structured omission denotes a process whereby issues are either not explained fully (or accurately) thus generating ignorance of those issues and consequent non-action by those fed such information. And this process is evident through linguistic obfuscation that distorts accuracy (or the comprehensiveness) of information.

An interesting example of linguistic obfuscation – or structured omission – is provided by Graeber and Weingrow, 2021, 6-7. These authors note, for instance, how problems relating to inequality might have been framed in the 19th century by reference to "the concentration of capital, or oligopoly, or class power".

But, in modern society, this is no longer the case in respect of the term "social inequality" in vogue today. This concept is, according to these authors, more akin to a term that almost designed to promote half-measures and compromise. For, although it is possible to imagine overthrowing capitalism or dismantling state power, it is not easy to see "what eliminating inequality would even mean?" (Graeber and Weingrow, 2021, 6-7).[34]

Linguistic obfuscation is also seen in the fields of social policy and housing through the usage of terms such as "stakeholders, "citizenship," and "communities," terms which serve to create an illusion of equal partnerships but conceal underlying and unequal social class relations. Nor are these terms cosy or neutral as they hide the harsh reality of poverty and social exclusion that many working-class people experience[35];[36]. Another example of obfuscation concerning housing, is the conflation of affordable housing with social housing, led from 2009 onwards by the Scottish Government.

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[33] It is important to stress that people may themselves be unaware that they are presenting wrong or inaccurate information, or omitting issues of relevance when presenting information, as they themselves may subscribe to the ideas of the ruling elite or are ignorant of relevant issues.

[34] Graeber and Weingrow, 2021, 6-7, espouse the view that the concept "inequality" is, consequently, a subtle way of framing social problems appropriate to contemporary capitalism, an age of "technocratic reformers" who do not ever envisage imminent changes to societal structures, that "no real vision of social transformation is on the table".

[35] Social exclusion was historically rooted in discussions concerning "les exclus", people who are economically disadvantaged in the workplace (Spicker, 1998). It is thus inextricably linked with issues concerning poverty and deprivation.

[36] See Montgomery, 2011, for information about different forms of structured omission, including how this relates to institutionalised forms of societal discrimination.

Indeed, many tenants in the social rented sector can only afford to pay their rents through accessing housing benefit.[37]

It is critical, then, to reflect on how language use affects, not only how we perceive the world, but also how we interpret it. For unconscious acceptance of language use leads, not merely to compliance with reactionary ideologies, but also an inability to challenge effectively the ideological position of the "haves and the have nots" (Graeber and Weingrow, 2021).[38]

Linguistic obfuscation is of direct relevance to social housing, too, as historical developments illustrate how previous housing discourse from the 1960's that used terms such as community control, community development and so on have shifted to the use of apolitical terms such as "customer" and "tenant participation". In short, previous terminology has been replaced with housing terminology more befitting capitalist market interests.[39] The specific theme of language use will, therefore, permeate this book. This is intended to stimulate the reader to challenge terms that might appear to be innocuous, but which serve to conceal, not simply competing class interests, but to prevent proper understanding of things.

Language use and promoting equality in line with housing law

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, s. 39, requires social landlords to promote equality matters throughout their services; this could include using appropriate language. But language used in policy documentation developed by social landlords often fails to achieve this objective (Montgomery, 2011).

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[37] For example, in Partick Housing Association, which will be covered in Chapter 9, the author was informed by email from the Association that at 7th October 2024, 633 tenants were in receipt of either full or partial Housing Benefit while 380 tenants were in receipt of Universal Credit. This equates to around 35% of tenants being in receipt of full or partial Housing Benefit and around 21% on Universal Credit (some 56% overall).

[38] On a broader note, language goes hand in glove with power, a point recognised by the famous Spanish grammarian, Antonio de Nebrija, whose Castilian grammar was established to create a modern Spanish language used throughout Spain, to strengthen the fledgling empire (Albig, 2008, 50).

[39] This topic can only be treated cursorily, but it represents an interesting and fruitful area for more detailed research. See Richardson, 2010, for an overview of the use of the term "customer" and its relation to tenants' needs and service delivery.

For example, in equality policies used by social landlords, phrases such as "respecting and valuing other people's differences" are not only unclear: such phrases are basically meaningless.[40]

It is important, therefore, to use language that promotes positive views about other people. One example of this would be to use the social model of disability within policy documentation which is different in kind to the medicalised model of disability that "locates the 'problem' of disability within the individual and sees the causes of this problem as stemming from the functional limitations or psychological losses which are assumed to arise from disability" (Oliver, 1996, 32).[41] An example of language common within equality policies in housing that reflect the medical model of disability is the reference to "people with a disability.[42]

Language use, it is stressed, represents a weapon of potential change, linguistic terminology affecting both how we regard other people and act in life. The significance of language with reference to disability is aptly summed up by Slorach, 2016, 25, who notes that the term "disability" – as advocated by the United Kingdom disability movement - refers to "disadvantage, inequality and discrimination primarily as a social

[40] Such language is a common feature, not simply of social landlords' policies, but of equality and human rights law in general. For example, in human rights law, it is specified that individual people have a right to adequate housing. But without providing resources to realise this, such a right is not achievable (Leckie,1992). See Hooton, 1996, and the Scottish Government 2019a, for an explanation of technical language used in housing.

[41] The social model of disability is promoted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, as well as by the former Disability Rights Commission, 2006, 2, which stated: "At present disabled people do not have the same opportunities or choices as non-disabled people. Nor do they enjoy equal respect of full inclusion in society on an equal basis. The poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion experienced by many disabled people is not the inevitable result of their impairments or medical conditions, but rather stems from attitudinal and environmental barriers. This is known as the 'social model of disability'". Slorach, 2016, 253, notes that the prevalence of impairment is increasing in line with an aging population in the United Kingdom. To cite Slorach: "…one in 20 UK children are disabled compared to one in five working age adults, and almost one in two people over state pension age".

[42] From the total number of 52 equality policies reviewed by Montgomery, 2011, only two policies (or four per cent) actively promoted the social model through a stated commitment to this model and application of its principles into actual language used.

phenomenon, something caused by society rather than directly arising from each individual's impairment".[43] The consequence of this is that, if people are disabled by society, it is logically possible to create a society in which this does not happen.

This section concludes with three notable points. The first point is that the importance of language use must not be conflated with political correctness which is a concept employed ideologically often by right-wing proponents to undermine equality strategies (Thompson, 2003,167). One of the effects of the right wing "political correctness agenda" is to distract "attention from important issues of power and oppression", issues which are clearly linked to language use (Thompson, 2003, 72). Language use, for example, can contribute to discrimination and oppression, as well as alienating and dividing people (Thompson, 2003, 76). Words are not, per se, problematic, but the "ways in which they are used" (Thompson, 2009).

The second point is that, while language use might be discriminatory, this is not necessarily synonymous with conscious discrimination. For example, people use words which they have learned through experience and then internalise this language. What is important to recognise, though, is that language can be used by elite groups within capitalism to create negative views about other people to serve their political interests. And, from the perspective of socialism, this must be challenged.

Following on from the point above, language use must be linked to consideration of people's intentions. As Slorach, 2016, 24, writes: "Most of us would prefer genuine support from people unfamiliar with the right terminology to brusque, dismissive or plain insulting attitudes from someone careful to use the correct language. There is a qualitative difference between someone using the phrase "confined to a wheelchair" while supporting equal access to transport, and a coach company which trains its staff to the use of more acceptable terms such as "wheelchair user" while still refusing to provide accessible vehicles on cost grounds. What is true for individuals, in other words, applies to a far greater degree to the actions of governments and big business".

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[43] The social model of disability is rooted in the period of political and social protests which took place in the 1960s, in particular campaigns by disabled people for greater autonomy in residential settings, as well as comprehensive review of disability income levels and new living options (Barnes and Mercer, 2010, 27).