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It Shouldn't Happen Here: Colonial and racial discourses of deservingness in UK anti-poverty campaign

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Abstract

In September 2012, Save the Children UK launched the It Shouldn't Happen Here campaign, to raise awareness of the incidence of poverty amongst British children, and raise funds for the charity's UK programmes. Shortly after the launch, SCUK experienced severe media and political backlash, as primarily centre and right-wing commentators described the campaign as a political stunt, and sought to discredit, deny and depoliticise the claims that severe child poverty 'happens here'. Drawing on interviews with former staff, and an analysis of the media response, this article explores the ways in which the campaign and the ensuing backlash were embedded in a set of colonial and racialized discourses around 'who is poor' and who is deserving/undeserving both in Britain and globally. Crucially, the findings from this study raise important challenges to the recent reintroduction of questions of race (as whiteness) in populist discussions around class and poverty.

Keywords

austerity, child poverty, media, race-ethnicity, white working class

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Introduction

The global economic crisis of 2007–2008 brought about worldwide recession, the economic and political repercussions of which are still felt today. In Britain, the downturn facilitated the intensification of public debates about poverty and welfare. While from 2008 until 2010, the Labour government attempted to stimulate the economy through increased social spending and temporary VAT cuts, the 2010 general election saw a coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats come to power, heralding a radical shift in government policy. From 2010, a vast swathe of public spending cuts and a drastic reduction of public expenditure on working-age benefits were rolled out in an attempt to address so-called 'welfare dependency' and create a 'leaner' state. These cuts impacted significantly on welfare provision, including housing, social care as well as child welfare (Burman, 2016; Taylor-Gooby, 2013). Further, shortly after getting in power the coalition government oversaw a rolling back of targets aimed at tackling child poverty, notably changing the terms of the Child Poverty Act, which committed the government to reaching four income-based targets by 2020, instead putting forward a relative measure of child poverty, and restructuring the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission to focus exclusively on social mobility. These drastic rollbacks were met with concern by a number of child-focused agencies (see Oxfam, 2012) and provided the impetus for Save the Children UK (SCUK) – the UK team of the charity otherwise known for its international work – to launch the 'It shouldn't happen here' campaign.

The campaign was launched on 5 September 2012, publicising a report titled 'Child poverty in 2012: "It Shouldn't Happen Here"' (Whitham, 2012). The report documented the experience of families living in poverty, notably highlighting the desperate choices often made by parents between heating their accommodation or providing hot food. The report focused primarily on in-work poverty, thereby challenging some of the prevailing rhetoric around worklessness. It departed from more traditional ways of talking about poverty by highlighting relative poverty, well-being and mental health. The campaign aimed to raise funds for UK programmes such as Families and Schools Together and Eat Learn Play, while simultaneously offering an intervention into British politics by recentring the issue of child poverty in the UK context. The campaign was rolled out across print and social media, as well as television advertising. It drew attention to the ways public sector cuts were affecting children and their families and to the fact that 1.6 million children were growing up in severe poverty.

Shortly after the launch, the organisation experienced severe media and political backlash from primarily centrist and right-wing commentators. An

analysis of the hostile media reveals three main critical narratives which sought to discredit, deny and depoliticise the claims made by the campaign.

Drawing on interviews with former SCUK staff, and a thematic analysis of the campaign material and the media backlash, this study explores the ways in which both the campaign and the ensuing backlash were embedded in a set of discourses around race, class, nation and deservingness. In so doing, this article locates the It Shouldn't Happen Here campaign within a wider discursive landscape mired in colonial and racialized imaginations of poverty. The works of Bhattarcharyya, Shilliam, Virdee and other racial and postcolonial readings of capitalism prove particularly generative, helping reveal how racialised notions of a deserving poverty are inflected in often conflicting, contradictory and ironic ways. In particular I argue that recognition of poverty is only admitted into wider popular discourse once it is stripped of any political ramifications – where poverty is seen as exclusively elsewhere (the Global South), as the remit of philanthropy as opposed to democratic action, and/or is redirected towards a nationalist and white chauvinist politics and away therein from any anti-capitalist or anti-austerity commitments. The findings from this study are useful in thinking about the shifting contours of the relationship between development, welfare, poverty/class and race, at a time when the reintroduction of race through the focus on the 'white working class' obscures some of the tensions in how deserving/undeserving categories are produced.

Thus, I start by laying out the discourse of un/deservingness, how it works through racial differentiation, and the way it relates to communication and fundraising strategies. I then provide a brief account of the research process. Following from that I offer some key findings, looking at how the campaign material and the hostile media response both challenge and reinforce colonial dichotomies between 'here' and 'there'. I then situate the aftermath of the campaign in the context of contemporary populist discussions around class and poverty. Specifically, I suggest that hostility to social welfare is routinely justified by reference to an alleged contradiction or competition between race and class, in a way which disserves effective social policy. I conclude by offering some final thoughts on the need to provide alternative frames to prevalent discussions around class and poverty as the cumulative effects of a decade of austerity and the economic repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic are felt by many.

Deserving/undeserving dichotomies as communication strategy

British sociology and critical social policy have long been sensitive to the terms by which the provisioning of poverty relief and the welfare state more broadly

have been tied to moralizing frameworks of a deserving poor (Golding and Middleton, 1982; Jensen and Tyler, 2015; Stedman Jones, 1976; Volmert et al., 2016; Williams, 1989). In the aftermath of the 2008 crisis and in the context of a dramatic rolling back of public provision, vilifying images of 'welfare dependents' were mobilised, including through references to 'scroungers' (Morrison, 2019). Importantly, from the 1990s, focus on the 'underclass' borrowed from earlier registers of degeneration and national decline (Virdee, 2014), transposing 20th century ascriptions into moral panics around 'chavs' or 'skivers' (Jones, 2011; Tyler, 2008) – attesting to how discursive shifts are rooted in evolving notions of morality and deservingness. The deserving/undeserving dichotomy dates back to Elizabethan Poor Laws, and the desire to formally differentiate between 'deserving' (i.e. the chronically sick, orphaned, old or war-wounded) and 'undeserving' claimants (i.e. the able-bodied yet idle or vagrant) (Golding and Middleton, 1982: 10). In *Rethinking Racial Capitalism*, Gargi Bhattacharyya explores the role of raciality in the 'differentiation of populations under capitalism'. Using Cedric Robinson's notion that capitalism relies on differentiation rather than homogenisation (1983) Bhattacharyya understands racial capitalism as a 'process by which capitalist formations create by default the edge-populations that serve as the other and limit of the working class' (2018: 5), where the racial is precisely that which creates subordinated or edge/surplus populations. Thus, the dichotomy of deserving/undeserving as a technique of capitalist differentiation works through racial distinctions. For example, Shilliam and Makdisi argue that the 'undeserving' working classes were often 'blackened' (Shilliam, 2018) or 'orientalized' (Makdisi, 2014: 23–24). Thus, in their respective registers the authors argue that condescending conceptions of an innocent or hapless poverty are coloured by colonial-era conceptions of poverty. Indeed, the noble simplicity of the deserving 'starving child' *elsewhere* implicitly dislocates this poverty from wider circuits of capitalist accumulation and/or issues of global governance, while also often denying the presence of a 'faultless' poverty from within the West/UK. This not only helps better situate how the discourse of the deserving/undeserving poor relates to racial normativity and symbolisms but it also makes evident a particularly arresting contradiction, one that is often neglected in more commonplace readings of race's relationship to capitalism. In one sense it is widely understood that those who are unable to stage a decorum of respectability – including assorted racialised minorities but also white denizens seen as lacking in class propriety – are often denigrated as undeserving of welfarist or even community support (Tyler, 2008). But what is perhaps less well-understood is how racialised discursive schemas around poverty can also have wider, perhaps paradoxical effects that impede a philanthropic or political sensitivity to local class

suffering – wherein abject poverty deserving of charitable intervention is often seen as the preserve of the old colonial *elsewhere.* Local poverty is accordingly seen as either of a benign, moderate order and as a cultural or personality deficit when appraised against pervasive neoliberal moral economies as regards self-reliance, responsibility, familial rectitude, and entrepreneurial resourcefulness.

Such an awareness helps better locate the challenges that British poverty relief and advocacy organisations must contend with. Communication and fundraising strategies often rely, inadvertently or not, on discursive practices around the deserving/undeserving poor (Rosenthal, 2000). For Burman, the conventional 'child charity genre' of the Global North usually focuses on specific humanitarian crises or acute emergencies, raising funds for 'other' children and communities (2016: 25). Importantly, she states that such strategies are often more effective at generating revenue, arguing that: '[a] poor starving Black child is so central to the idiom of charity appeals that aid campaigns depart from this convention only at the risk of prejudicing their income' (1994: 29). Crucially, the representations of need that are depicted by charities in their fundraising materials do more than simply prompt a financial response from donors. They provide an authoritative portrayal of beneficiaries and contribute to defining public understanding around social issues (Breeze and Dean 2012: 9). Put differently, charity-sponsored material is not merely responsive to discursive structures but is itself co-constitutive of that very discourse. We see this clearly when looking at the It Shouldn't Happen Here Campaign and how it is positioned within the wider discursive fault lines around race, class, nation and deservingness.

The research

Despite the newsworthy prominence of the It Shouldn't Happen Here campaign at the time, very little has been written about it in a critically academic environment. Erica Burman is a notable exception here, where her short chapter focused on the campaign to explore the key tensions and dilemmas navigated by child-focused agencies (2016). While the chapter offers some valuable preliminary insights, it draws from just one *Daily Mail* article and as her focus is on representations of childhood, Burman does not expand on the interplay with colonial and white imaginations of poverty. The campaign is also mentioned in Lansley and Mack's *Breadline Britain*, albeit in a short paragraph (2015: 206) about the rise of poverty in Britain. Importantly, the scale of the backlash meant that no formal evaluation or internal review was conducted after the campaign, and so there was very little 'grey literature'

about it. The gap in writing around this particular campaign was one of the main motivations behind this study, and also explains some of the methodological choices made.

This study is based on a combination of qualitative methods including in-depth interviews with former SCUK staff and media analysis. The time-lapse between the campaign in September 2012 and my interviews in June-July 2019 meant that none of the people involved in the campaign at the time were still working for SCUK. However, having worked in the development sector a few years prior, I was able to trace former employees through old contacts and a snowballing technique. I conducted three semi-structured interviews, each lasting between 60 to 90 min. Two participants were directly involved in the campaign, and one was involved with SCUK at a senior level at the time of the campaign. Photo-elicitation enabled me to grant interviewees 'greater space for personal interpretations and responses' (Lapenta, 2011), using images from the 2012 report and stills from the campaign video as visual prompts. This helped me gain insight into the rationales behind the choice of visual campaign materials, as per Schwartz's suggestion that photo-elicitation can bring to light details only visible to the interviewee (1989). Such first-hand access to figures *directly* involved in such a high profile but contentious and under-studied campaign lends this study a distinctive immediacy and significance.

In addition to the interviews, I collected, using the Nexis database, all newspaper articles published by established press outlets when the campaign was launched. I was able to find 36 texts, 28 of which were primarily focused on the campaign while eight referred to the campaign in passing whilst illustrating a wider point (e.g. focus on food banks). Both interview transcripts and newspaper articles were uploaded into Nvivo to allow for systematic reading and analysis of the texts. This enabled me to sort and categorise the data in order to identify patterns, going over the data 'over and over again' (Taylor, 2015: 39).

Due to the aforementioned lack of literature about the campaign, interview data was used primarily to give an insight into the context and the process of campaign production. The transcripts were analysed thematically, to shed light on the context preceding the campaign, internal workings of the organisation (including typical campaign process), campaign purpose and aftermath.

In parallel, I inductively analysed the newspaper data, using Braun and Clarke's (2006) model for thematic analysis. The latter offer six phases of thematic analysis: familiarizing yourself with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report. In particular, I looked for the ideological but also

emotive registers employed in the articles, the (loaded) imagery that was descriptively invoked (alongside actual images that might have featured), as well as some of the moral and empirical comparisons made in rationalising the editorial angle (e.g. how certain comparisons about poverty levels help validate/invalidate the campaign).

Taken together the analysis of interview data and the newspapers review enabled me to identify some of the patterns and themes explored in the following sections, including evocations of continuity or departure and the contrasting of philanthropic and political forms of poverty. The key findings are explored in the next sections, starting with an exploration of SCUK's framing of UK poverty drawing on interview data and an analysis of the campaign material, followed by a breakdown of the hostile media response.

Depicting UK poverty: challenging or reinforcing colonial dichotomies?

In her case study looking at the publicity and reception of It Shouldn't Happen Here, Erica Burman argues that the campaign clearly signalled a departure from the 'conventional child charity genre of the Global North' (2016: 29). Indeed, while it was not the first time that SCUK was running or fundraising for UK programmes, it was the first time the organisation specifically launched a public-facing fundraising campaign for its domestic work. Crucially, in a clear attempt to draw attention to a sense of novelty and indeed urgency in the context of unprecedented rolling back of child poverty targets and social welfare cuts, the media team decided to construct the campaign as a 'first', including in the press releases. The framing was picked up enthusiastically by the press, with a writer for the *Sun* newspaper calling it the 'first ever appeal for British kids' (Nanjiani, 2012), while a *Times* article stated 'Save the Children launched a poverty campaign in Britain *for the first time in its 93-year history*' (Midgley, 2012 emphasis added).

It is critical to think about the ways in which there is also a degree of continuity in the ways that the campaign worked within existing discourses of poverty, notably through the slogan and campaign title It Shouldn't Happen Here. Burman warns against merely taking the slogan at face value, which would suggest the acceptability of 'it' happening elsewhere, instead arguing that the 'surrounding context' led her to interpret the slogan to mean 'it shouldn't happen *anywhere*' (2016: 37–38). However, the interviews conducted revealed a careful process in the crafting of any campaign. For that reason, it seems just to assess the campaign and actively engage with the materials and framings that were put forth by the team behind it.

The use of the word 'here' is particularly important. While it is decidedly ambiguous, it is also relational in nature, only possible in relation to a 'there'. The here/there dichotomy in the context of poverty as put forward by an NGO known for its 'overseas' work needs to be understood as willingly or unwillingly relying on a colonial imagination of 'here' and 'there' (Burman, 2016; Klouda, 2007). The responses to the campaign and the explicit references to colonial imaginations of 'Africa' support this argument. One of the ways that the here/there dichotomy was given form was through the choice of visual representation that accompanied the text and slogan of the campaign.

Visual representations play a critical role in generating philanthropic responses, and as such charities devote a lot of time making decisions about framing and choosing images (Breeze and Dean, 2012; Klouda, 2007; Rosenthal, 2000). For the It Shouldn't Happen Here campaign, the dual aims of fundraising and raising consciousness arguably impacted on the choice of images. Thus, the report included a range of images, all 'real people' involved in SCUK programmes in various parts of the country. There were three main types of visual representations used in the campaign: the main image used as the campaign banner, the TV advert and the images chosen to illustrate the report by Whitham (2012). The TV advert follows a white boy named 'Alex', as he spends the day mostly alone in his flat pretending to be a brave prince (SCUK, 2012a). In the advert, the realities of child poverty are reimagined as the prince's adventures (e.g. braving the cold). Alex' speech directly to camera is complemented by on-screen captions offering insights and statistical data from the report. The advert ends with these words: 'Alex and his family are actors. But growing up in severe poverty is a reality for 1.6 million children in the UK today. It shouldn't happen here.'

In the main campaign image, the choice of 'Lauren', a white child with blonde/light brown hair, helps to cement an imagination of what 'here' is. Similarly, 'Alex', the brave prince of the TV advert firmly establishes who the 'poor child' is. Finally, in the report, out of six images, five feature children or families which may be read as white, and only one features a black family. Two images focus on children in Wales, and two others are located in Glasgow.

Stuart Hall's framing of 'presences' and 'absences' (1984: 255–257) is useful in thinking about what exists beyond the frame. Hall warned about the political importance of representation stating that 'it matters profoundly what and who gets represented, what and who regularly and routinely gets left out' (1986: 9). This exhorts us to question what has been deliberately included and/or excluded in the frame, and what effects this produces.

SCUK, like many organisations, is home to a microcosm of competing politics, visions and aims. The interviews revealed that internal tensions within the organisation were a factor in determining the direction of the

campaign. Thus, two interviewees described the way that choices made in the lead-up to the campaign reflected specific individual or team objectives and thus communication strategies, with some teams focused on trying to 'shock people into action', while others were more concerned with finding the 'trigger that actually might make a politician change their mind'.

Reflecting on the images chosen, the interviewees expressed some discomfort around the challenges of visually representing and homogenising the experience of poverty. Two of the people interviewed joked about the way that the media often resort to using the same stock images to represent UK poverty and explained that part of the campaign aim was to move away from stereotypes of what poverty looks like, with one interviewee insisting that 'actually child poverty is across the country, it's in different types of places, it's not always about housing estates and it's not always as easy to tell that people are living in poverty'.

The tensions around the choice of images reflect the dual role of SCUK both adapting to the wider climate and existing discussions around poverty, while simultaneously contributing to shape these very discussions. This is summarised by a former senior advisor who explains:

> Difficult thing about depictions really, you're thinking about how people make judgements, if you're showing a black person or Asian person in the film, how people would react to that (…) But I think with Save the Children we were too conscious of that, I don't think we gave people, the general public, enough credit and I think we were too worried about people's reactions (…) I mean there was evidence about people's attitudes towards poverty and people in poverty and all this stuff about skivers and strivers and all that, which was really really strong at that time, which is maybe why we were more sensitive to it than maybe we'd be now, because George Osbourne was really pushing that kind of language at that time.

Here the interviewee suggests that SCUK were 'too worried' about the potential pushback they assumed would have followed had they included racialized children or families in the visual representations. It is unclear what exactly this anticipated pushback would have looked like, whether they feared a media and political backlash, or perhaps that the campaign would not quite capture audiences' attention, and thus generate less revenue. Yet, the 'worry' in itself raises important questions about SCUK staff's perception of the general public's understanding of child poverty and its relation to race. Research around poverty rates in the UK have consistently found higher rates of poverty amongst Black and Minority Ethnic groups than white groups (JRF, 2017; Kenway and Palmer, 2007; Social Metrics Commission, 2020). As such, the decision to have the

campaign fronted by a white child deserves to be explored. For Burman, the choice of a white child works to support the key point of the campaign, that this is 'home-grown' poverty. Thus, we see an explicit form of racialization in what she describes as the 'active avoidance of the underlying racial iconography associated with being an "immigrant"' (2016: 30). Further, the more implicit racialization of poverty through the use of the here/there dichotomy is aligned with other binaries such as white/black or British/immigrant which have long defined discourses of inclusion and exclusion within popular as well as welfare policy discourse (Bakshi et al., 1995; Burman, 2016; Williams, 1989). In other words, the choice of visuals made by the SCUK team, which encompasses both regional diversity and racial homogeneity, works to inform the reader that 'it' is happening 'here' to 'us'.

I would argue that this choice is embedded in wider discourses around race, class and nation. For El-Tayeb (2011), all parts of Europe are invested in 'whiteness' as the norm against which racialized others are read, as a tool of differentiation between insiders and outsiders. Similarly, many have made similar claims about the relationship between whiteness and Britishness (Gilroy, 1992) or Englishness (Hall, 1992; Virdee, 2014). In particular, as noted earlier, narrations of class and poverty borrow heavily from racialized discourses (Shilliam, 2018; Tyler, 2008). Thus, in the predominant absence of racialised children, and by relying on a racial dichotomy of here/there, the campaign material operates on a discursive level in fitting with wider paradigms of Britishness, race and class.

Hall's aforementioned notion of 'presences' and 'absences' helps us understand the way in which the campaign elicits an imagery within which to locate its claims. If this was done by the campaign itself in mostly subtle and implicit ways, the media response relied on more explicit racializing discourses of un/deservingness as detailed in the next section.

Media reception: discrediting, denying and depoliticising UK child poverty

The campaign launch was reported widely across the British national press, as well as regional outlets. The initial reporting mostly echoed the key messages of the campaign. On the day of the launch, all outlets made explicit references to the fundraising goal of £500,000. The headlines were all neutral, reflecting the wording of the campaign (e.g. 'Poverty is "tearing British families apart" says charity Save the Children' (Doughty, 2012), 'Poverty-stricken kids in world's seventh richest country: Save the Children launches first fundraising

campaign in UK' (Parry, 2012)). One interviewee explains that the team was 'really pleased' with the initial response.

However, the headlines from the following day revealed a shift in some of the media reception. *The Times*, which hadn't published anything on the day of the launch titled a piece 'Washed-up pop stars are no doubt being lined up to do a single', signalling a degree of scepticism towards the campaign, writing:

> This isn't really a charity campaign, of course; it is a political one. Save the Children has evolved from an aid charity into a political pressure group against cuts. 'The Government has the tools it needs to address child poverty, but must show the political will to do so', it whines (Times, 2012).

In a piece published by the *Daily Mail* in the early hours of September 6th, Douglas Murray, associate director of the neoconservative and pro-austerity Henry Jackson Society at the time, labelled the campaign an 'obscene political stunt', heralding much of the backlash to come, as other mainstream papers followed suit.

While the research was not specifically designed to investigate differences between England and the devolved nations it is important to note that interviewees suggested that the reception of the campaign was different in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, reflecting findings by McKendrick et al., that papers in the devolved parts of the UK were more likely to pick up positively on poverty stories than national papers (2008: 42). There was also a sense that local reporting (including for local radio), notably in the North of England was more sympathetic, compared to national reporting.

A thematic analysis of the hostile national media reveals three main critical narratives which respectively discredited, denied and depoliticised the claims made by the It Shouldn't Happen Here campaign. The first sees in the campaign an attempt by SCUK to 'play party politics'. Thus, several articles made explicit references to the CEO at the time, Justin Forsythe, and his affiliation to the Labour government as a former advisor to Gordon Brown (*Daily Mail*, 2012; Hamilton, 2012), while a *Telegraph* article quotes Christopher Snowdon, a fellow of the Institute for Economic Affairs and author of a critical report on the reliance of charities on state funding, who referred to the campaign as 'completely about party politics' (Bingham, 2012).

The second narrative centred around challenging the very claims made by the campaign. This was done in two complementary ways: first by denying that 'poverty' exists in Britain, with for example Murray writing 'no child in Britain can possibly be said to be living in that kind of poverty —

without food or heating' (2012). This denial often worked through challenging the way poverty is measured (Murray, 2012; Times, 2012). Second, many used comparisons to challenge the idea of British poverty being real. Thus, most critical pieces made references to either a historical past, with the *Telegraph*'s Daniels writing about 1,909 infant mortality rates (2012), or other geographical locations. Several outlets referred explicitly to 'starving children in Africa' (Murray, 2012), 'Third World country with millions of children starving' (Times, 2012) or 'those in need in the Third World' (Bingham, 2012). In that moment the 'Third World' and the 'millions of children in Africa and around the world' with 'exposed ribcages, swollen bellies and flies buzzing about thin and drawn faces' (Clark, 2012) are used to encode a deserving Other, opposed to the British families described by the campaign. This echoes recent findings by Volmert et al., who identified a 'post-poverty cultural model' and the prevalent belief that 'UK society is prosperous and has progressed beyond poverty' (2016). This framing is reminiscent of Escobar's notion of the development discourse as requiring problematization (1995: 41). Thus, development discourse, which categorises the 'Third World' as in need of reform, works to support dichotomies of deserving and undeserving poor, this time across a global context. In other words, it is only possible to deny the existence of poverty in Britain by privileging another 'real' experience of poverty elsewhere and/or by framing it as a self-inflicted phenomenon.

This ties in with the third main critique which revolved around disputing the political notion of state failure put forward by some of the campaign material, and instead seeing poverty as a sign of personal failure. Thus, former CEO of Barnardo's Martin Narey wrote for *The Times*:

> This isn't to say that there are not emergencies when families do need urgent help with food or clothing. But they are generally short-term and caused by an administrative glitch, a marital separation, because money has been lost and sometimes, frankly, because it has been squandered on drink or drugs. Such crises are not symptomatic of the welfare state's failure to provide families with enough money for the basics of life (2012).

This was echoed in a number of other articles, with Daniels denouncing SCUK for 'misidentifying the problem' which he characterised as an 'entrenched cultural problem, of state-encouraged, if not promoted, ignorance, dependence and cultural degradation' (2012). Similarly, for Murray, poverty ensues when parents 'grossly misus[e] their handouts' (2012), while Bingham cited Christian Guy who points to 'welfare dependency' and 'family breakdown' as causes of poverty (Bingham, 2012). We should note that as a

former Special Adviser to David Cameron, and Director of Policy to Ian Duncan Smith, Guy was a leading architect of some of the welfare reforms that the campaign aimed to shed a light on.

Here, it is worth exploring the underlying assumptions behind much of the media's hostile description of the campaign as 'political'. Indeed, while claims that SCUK was playing 'party politics' stemmed from the rigid regulations around charities' ability to take political positions, closer engagement with the texts suggests another underlying tension.

The distinction made between deserving Others and undeserving Britons requires the naturalisation of poverty as a feature of life in the Global South. The insistence on the comparison to a foreign Other relies on the notion that the 'Third World' is a worthy victim, not because of a capitalist, geopolitical or historical context, but because of the purportedly 'dysfunctional national *cultures*' (Valluvan, 2019: 239) that induce such chronic and perennial cycles of destitution. Crucially, the people of the 'Third World' are deserving insofar as their struggle is a domestic one, unrelated to the Global North. With poverty a feature intrinsic to Global South *cultures*, it becomes possible for journalists to successfully use words such as 'Third World', 'Africa' or simply 'Sudan' to conjure up shared understandings of not merely 'here' and 'there' but how different localities relate to poverty.

Thus, we see a distinction between, on the one hand, a 'philanthropic poverty' and/or abject poverty, often black and rooted in the Global South, which is construed as deserving of aid; and, on the other hand, a 'political poverty' that generates tensions and competing claims regarding culpability and responsibilities alike. In this dichotomy, there is a nobleness to philanthropic duty, evoked in several news articles. Importantly, I would argue that this provides not a challenge but an added layer to the relationship between the discourse of deservingness and raciality. While Shilliam shows that the 'blackening' of parts of the British working classes served to mark them as undeserving (2018), Bhattacharyya's work helps us understand that differentiation serves different capitalist 'needs' (2018: 20). Here it appears that what may seem contradictory in fact sustains the coherence of racial thinking as a technique of capitalism.

The effects of the distinction between (black) 'philanthropic poverty' which appears noble or deserving and (white) 'political poverty' are twofold. On the one hand, the critiques of the campaign which insisted on the distinction between 'the starving children of Africa' and British children and families further establish the notion that poverty is a naturalised and intractable feature of the colonial world, one which is (only) deserving of philanthropic amelioration as determined by the charitable redress of Western donors but is pre-emptively seen as impervious to political transformation.

On the other hand, the disavowal of poverty in a British context serves as a reminder that British audiences' relationship to 'real' (or abject) poverty is (only) a philanthropic one, not a political one. In fact, it appears that in admitting that poverty exists in Britain (i.e. admitting abjection into the local), poverty *becomes* political. In both instances, poverty is depoliticised, but by extension, the domestic form of poverty is denied even a philanthropic remit. These attempts to pathologize welfare recipients, de-politicise poverty, and relegate it to the realm of personal responsibility, pointing to self-willed dysfunction, in line with familiar discourses of un/deservingness, are themselves rooted in colonial understandings of the locality and geography of abjection.

Arguably, the most controversial aspect of the It Shouldn't Happen Here campaign lay in the collapsing (or at least destabilising) of the distinction between 'there' and 'here'. This collapsing happened through the wording of the slogan and the choice of visual representation, and because Save the Children is primarily known for its overseas work. This was reinforced by the framing of this campaign as a 'first'. However, this required an almost complete erasure of race in the images chosen, as the use of iconography associated by race and immigration would have run the risk of jeopardizing the framing of the campaign as focused on 'here' (Burman, 2016: 30). Therefore, in the almost complete erasure of racialised others in the campaign, lies the possibility of collapsing 'here' and 'there', thereby 'shocking people into action'.

Importantly, in both the media and wider political backlash which ensued, we see a reassertion of this very dichotomy, both through the repeated use of comparisons outlined above, and the rejection of the central claim of the campaign that poverty happens 'here'. In that sense, the backlash to the campaign must be seen as a rejection of the proposition that what happens 'there' happens 'here' too, an almost literal rebuttal 'It *doesn't* happen here'. Thus, the refusal to allow a framing which would admit a philanthropic form of poverty into the local, seems only possible by rejecting the notion of there being 'social problems' requiring (political) intervention in austerity Britain.

Here, Escobar's work is again useful in thinking about this resistance. For Escobar, the discourse of development must be seen as a historical construct that provides a space in which poor countries (and indeed poor people) are known, specified, and intervened upon (1995: 44–45). In other words, we may see in the backlash and the attempts to depoliticize the issue of child poverty a way of refusing the categorisation that white Britons should be 'intervened upon', as this would signal a shift in the power differential between those who provide assistance and those who receive it.

'We got scared of talking about UK poverty': race, class and poverty in austere times

While SCUK's It Shouldn't Happen Here campaign was a bold and critical intervention in its attempt to raise awareness of the incidence of UK child poverty and raise funds for domestic anti-poverty programmes, amidst the backdrop of 'the deepest and most precipitate cuts ever made in social provision' (Taylor-Gooby, 2013: viii), the accusations of its partaking in party politics had a severe impact on the charity. SCUK's charitable status and dependency on government funding - with £136 million out of £284 million yearly income coming from national and local government grants in 2012 (SCUK, 2012b) - made it particularly vulnerable to accusations of breaking regulations around political neutrality. Internally, two interviewees explained that the organization went into a panic, as the most senior staff dealt with the backlash. The Board of Trustees in particular was worried about the wider implications for the organisation. A former senior advisor explained: 'As a team we got the message we're not going to do that kind of thing again'.

As a whole, the UK branch of Save the Children moved away from what an interviewee called 'pure poverty work' (e.g. household incomes and the benefit system, parents' experiences in the labour market) in favour of more focused campaigns around childcare provision and early years development, and what another programme head deemed 'short-termism' as opposed to long-term campaign and advocacy work. One interviewee argued: 'we stopped doing any UK poverty work basically. We got scared, after this report we got scared of talking about UK poverty'. The end of 2012 and early 2013 coincided with a wave of staff departures, which may in part reflect the aftermath of a difficult campaign as well as some of the directional change hinted at by the interviewees.

Arguably, and ironically, the very terms by which the campaign was rejected, and in particular the attempts to deny the existence of 'home-grown' poverty, have been reclaimed to serve populist and nationalist aims. Indeed, between 2012 and 2019, we have seen fundamental changes in conversations about economic justice, including a pointed reintroduction of questions of race (as whiteness) in populist discussions around class and poverty. In this way, some of the findings outlined previously relating to the tensions around representations of poverty anticipate the re-emergence of a narrative of Britain's white working class as a 'left behind' and *deserving* demographic. Thus, the ways in which the campaign suggested where poverty is located, and who Britain's poor may be, speaks to the recent critiques around the whitewashing of class and its effects (Barbulescu et al., 2019). In that sense, the choice to put

forward almost exclusively white children and their families to illustrate UK child poverty is not dissimilar to the recent hyperracialisation of the (white) working class in the discourse of the 'left behind', a discourse which effectively erases the classed experiences of ethnic minorities in Britain (Bhambra, 2017; Emejulu, 2016; Valluvan and Kalra, 2019).

We see this narrative bolstered by the findings of the recently published Sewell report, controversial for its denial of institutional racism in Britain. The authors of the report frame 'race' as divorced and opposed to class and instead argue that geography, class and religion have a greater impact on one's life chances than race (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, 2021: 8). In this way, the report lends support to the pervasive claim that 'race' and 'class' are 'separate and competing explanations for inequality and deprivation, thereby obscuring the fact that the majority of racialized people in the UK are working class (Knox, 2021) and black and minority ethnic children are twice more likely to live below the poverty line than white children (Francis-Devine, 2021). It also obscures the way in which immigration enforcement produces differentiated and multifaced exclusion and indeed poverty (de Noronha, 2020: 59–60). Conversely, the hyperracialisation of the (white) working class and the framing of the plight of white children (often specifically white boys) as a race issue rather than a class issue represents a striking obstacle to effective social policy (Barbulescu et al., 2019; Treloar, 2021).

Crucially, analysing the media response to the It Shouldn't Happen Here campaign revealed some significant links between the media backlash and a broader discourse against social welfare. Indeed, staunchly pro-austerity commentators with direct influence on welfare policy such as Christian Guy and Douglas Murray cited earlier, who show hostility towards social welfare, and social policy in general, often fall back on an alleged tension or competition between race and class/poverty and racialized notions of un/deservingness.

This steady whitewashing of class is not however comprehensive and is occasionally interrupted in quite striking ways – not least in the second half of 2020 via the intervention of England and Manchester United player Marcus Rashford. Rashford's successful campaign to extend free school meals for children during the summer holidays bolstered a national conversation about child food poverty and the role of welfare. Perhaps part of Rashford's appeal was his ability to not 'homogenise' the experience of child poverty. Indeed, while Rashford did not actively racialize poverty in his campaign, his being of Caribbean origin means that he was able to politicize poverty in a way which did not exclude racialized children's experiences.

Much can be learned from the success of Rashford's campaign. While some politicians and parts of the media did attempt to delegitimise him,

the young player attracted considerable popular support (Ipsos MORI, 2021). In effect, the ability of Rashford and his team to politicise the issue of child food poverty without invisibilising the plight of racialized children goes some way to support the interviewee quoted above who hinted at the need to 'give the general public more credit'. It suggests that it is perhaps not only necessary to hold the complexity of the relationship between race and poverty/class in Britain, but that it is politically expedient to do so when considering wider policy ramifications and possibilities.

Conclusion

This article has explored the ways in which the campaign both challenged and reinforced colonial discourses of deservingness. Interview data combined with a thematic analysis of the negative press response showed that both the campaign itself and the negative reception to it were mired in racial and colonial understandings of poverty and Britain's philanthropic relation to poverty, in a way which asserted imaginations of poverty rooted in exclusionary dichotomies around who is deserving/undeserving both in Britain and globally.

These findings serve as an important reminder of the relationship between the discourse of un/deservingness and its application through welfare reform under successive Conservative governments. Discussions about the way in which deservingness works through racial distinctions are particularly timely when thinking about contemporary British politics and social policy. The reception to the It Shouldn't Happen Here campaign, and the reintroduction of a deserving 'left behind' narrative, are best read as part of a longer continuum whereby discourses of poverty, class and race are constantly renegotiated.

Today's re-emergence of a focus on the 'white working class' destabilises and reconfigures established understandings of the deserving/undeserving poor dichotomy. The hyperracialisation of the 'left behind' as white, both challenges traditional understandings of who is understood as 'deserving', while simultaneously validating notions of deservingness along colonial and racial lines. Crucially, as many in Britain experience the cumulative and differentiated effects of a decade of austerity, compounded by the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is vital to offer alternative frames to current populist discussions around class and poverty.

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