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Imogen Tyler: Revolting Subjects: Eviction and Occupation in Neoliberal Britain.

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Seminar Series Reviews

Imogen Tyler: Revoltng Subjects: Eviction and Occupation in Neoliberal Britain.

Review by Sindy Joyce
MA in Sociology (Youth, Community and Social Regeneration)

In this seminar Imogen Tyler discussed the background of her study *Revoltng Subjects: Social abjection and resistance in neoliberal Britain* (2013) in the context of the 2011 Traveller eviction from Dale Farm in Basildon Essex and the negative portrayal of Travellers through media outlets. She gave a clear synopsis of the workings of neoliberal governmentality; the mechanisms of neo-liberalisation has produced the justification of how some people are referred to as the ‘underclass’ or ‘failed citizens’ through the racialization and stigmatization of classes. Distinctions and categorizations have profoundly created societal boundaries which has made it much more difficult for the disadvantaged to contravene and uphold their ethical and cultural rights. Travellers are one such group who have been culturally de-politicalised. Although, ethnicity status has been approved in Britain since 1997, it is clear, that Travellers still face extreme methods of de-humanisation through evictions and media portrayals. Within Tyler’s presentation she made numerous references to the obstinacy of Basildon council in their long running quest to evict the Travellers of Dale Farm.

For over a decade Irish Travellers evicted from other sites across Britain took refuge within Dale Farm. The notorious bailiff company of Constant and Co. was not only involved in the eviction of Dale Farm but were known to be brutal in their carrying out of other Traveller evictions throughout Britain. Certainly, Tyler offered a sincere account of the violations of human rights that were

associated with the eviction. In March 2010, the United Nations sent British authorities a letter stating that “the evictions may be in breach of the Convention’s provisions and are inconsistent with the Committee’s General Recommendation No.27 (2000) on Discrimination against Roma” (UN News Centre 2011). Nevertheless, British authorities continued to pursue with their violations of not providing alternative accommodation for the Travellers involved in the legal battle. Approximately 500 people faced the threat of eviction from the six acre plot of land that was owned by the Travellers themselves. Tyler explained that one half of the site was deemed legal in which planning permission was granted to erect dwellings; the other half which was built on a former scrap-yard was deemed to be greenbelt land and thus illegal (planning permission was refused).

As Tyler specified, the timing of the Dale Farm eviction coincided with civil unrest across the neoliberal nations. The growing resistance and anger towards the effects of neoliberal ideology was rife and many social movements erupted. Protesters from the numerous factions sympathised with the residents and in response set up Camp Constant at the entrance to Dale Farm. Tyler described how the ideology of neo-liberal governmentality interprets its ‘resisting’ and ‘revolting’ citizens as the ‘parasites’ of society that need to be controlled. The stigmatization of Irish Travellers in Britain which was heightened by David Cameron’s ‘Big Society’ has created an increase in social inequalities. Negative media depictions surrounding the Dale Farm eviction presented the leader of Basildon Council - Tony Ball as a reasonable man who was only upholding British rights and he emphasised that the Travellers were ‘law-breakers’. Within her presentation Tyler spoke about the irony of this because when Travellers do up-hold the law and apply for planning permission it is refused 90% of the time.

Tyler's research controversially asks the question "what kind of state are we living in". Her work has shown how the neoliberal government act as the deviant offenders (with policy as a guise) in which they depict the 'revolting subjects' to be. Certainly, Tyler has produced a significant piece of sociological work that demonstrates the use of Grahame Scrambler's 'Greedy Bastard Hypothesis' in action. As non-conformists of the neo-liberal system Travellers face the full force of the power of the state through evictions and persecution of nomadic lifestyles. The long-term implications resulting from the forceful eviction of Dale Farm for the residents are severe. The Irish Traveller Movement in Britain released an up-date statement on the conditions of the area just metres away from Dale Farm where the evicted families were camped. It stated that during the eviction Constant and Co. ruptured septic tanks in which raw sewage possibly contaminated water supplies. The health risks associated to this water contamination can be compared to those in third world countries (ITMB winter 2011/2012).

As a Traveller Tyler's presentation was notable for me as she gave a clear picture to the audience on the extremity of neo-liberalism while giving an account of the suffering Travellers faced from the Dale Farm eviction.

References

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