Article

Welfare Surveillance, Income Management and New Paternalism in Australia

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Abstract

This article discusses the situation of income support claimants in Australia, constructed as faulty citizens and flawed welfare subjects. Many are on the receiving end of complex, multi-layered forms of surveillance aimed at securing socially responsible and compliant behaviours. In Australia, as in other Western countries, neoliberal economic regimes with their harsh and often repressive treatment of welfare recipients operate in tandem with a burgeoning and costly arsenal of CCTV and other surveillance and governance assemblages. Through a program of 'Income Management', initially targeting (mainly) Indigenous welfare recipients in Australia's Northern Territory, the BasicsCard (administered by Centrelink, on behalf of the Australian Federal Government's Department of Human Services) is one example of this welfare surveillance. The scheme operates by 'quarantining' a percentage of a claimant's welfare entitlements to be spent by way of the BasicsCard on 'approved' items only. The BasicsCard scheme raises significant questions about whether it is possible to encourage people to take responsibility for themselves if they no longer have real control over the most important aspects of their lives. Some Indigenous communities have resisted the BasicsCard, criticising it because the imposition of income management leads to a loss of trust, dignity, and individual agency. Further, income management of individuals by the welfare state contradicts the purported aim that they become less 'welfare dependent' and more 'self-reliant'. In highlighting issues around compulsory income management this paper makes a contribution to the largely under discussed area of income management and welfare surveillance, with its propensity for function creep, garnering large volumes of data on BasicsCard user's approved (and declined) purchasing decisions, complete with dates, amounts, times and locations.

Introduction

In Australia, reframing welfare governance systems and employment promotion appeals to a rejuvenated neoliberal and paternalistic conception of welfare (Lantz and Marston 2012). At the core of this rationality is a focus on bureaucratic, measurable, rational-technocratic procedures and interventions to ensure compliance and to move welfare recipients into job-search training and employment. Welfare surveillance technologies and investigation strategies are at the heart of this policy suite, expanding the ways the state creates 'deviants' out of those who fail to be 'good market citizens' and reliable consumers of products and services (Monahan 2008; Maki 2011).

This article considers some of the implications of the expansion of welfare surveillance in Australia. It begins by briefly outlining the backdrop to neoliberal inspired welfare-to-work policies (a feature of both Labor and Conservative Federal Governments in the last thirty years) concerned with restricting access to welfare in general and, specifically, income support payments. Analysis will be extended to include a discussion of more recent so called welfare 'reforms', in the context of 'activation' and surveillance.

The focus is on the BasicsCard, as Australia is the first country in the world to enact this system of income management on identified income support claimants, introduced under the then Howard (Conservative)

Federal Government in 2007 (an election year) in the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER). It is worth noting that in Australia's Federal system of Government there are six States; Tasmania, New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia, and two mainland territories often treated as states, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. There are distinct and at times overlapping responsibilities between the States and Federal or Commonwealth Government, resulting in tensions and disputes over funding and other issues (Healey 2008). For the purposes of this article, the Federal Government only is discussed as it is responsible, through the Department of Human Services, for income support and other social security benefits Australia-wide and is hereafter referred to as the government.

The NTER was and remains, a controversial melange of interventions only implemented in the Northern Territory (NT), ostensibly to address issues raised in the 2007 *Little Children are Sacred* report, documenting the historic practice of child removal and its negative and on-going outcomes for Indigenous Australian individuals and communities, in the form of child sexual abuse and neglect, domestic violence and a complex array of other problems (Wild and Anderson 2007). Some of the so called 'emergency measures' carried out by the Howard Government—which could not bring itself to formally apologise for the forced removal of children featured in the report, while the newly elected Rudd Labor government of 2007 did so—included suspending the Racial Discrimination Act (1975) in order to specifically target Indigenous communities for compulsory health checks and the closure of community employment programs (Cox 2011).

Income management as one element of the NTER operates by 'quarantining' a proportion of a person's social security payments (including Newstart Allowance, Youth Allowance, Parenting Payment, Sickness Benefit and Special Benefit) to a specialised income management account accessed through the (electronic debit) BasicsCard (Australian Council of Social Service 2010; Billings 2011; Mendes 2012). Income managed monies can only be used to purchase items deemed to be 'essential' such as food, fuel, clothing, cleaning products and to pay rent. Prohibited items include alcohol, pornography, tobacco and tobacco products, gambling products/services and home-brew kits, but not chocolate, sweets or other 'unhealthy' food items (Department of Human Services 2013). In this way, the BasicsCard can be considered as a paternalistic control/caring, monitoring and surveillance assemblage deployed to secure socially and morally 'responsible' behaviours from some of the most disadvantaged individuals and the communities they live in, often denied the services and facilities available in most urban centres. The consequences of compulsory income management for welfare recipients include a sense of stigma and feelings of not being trusted, multilayered complexity, and a loss of control and active decision-making over personal and family finances (Cox 2011).

Background: Governing welfare in Australia

Over the past decade, there have been substantial reforms to the social welfare system in Australia. Similar to other Anglophone countries, an income support system with limited obligations on the unemployed has been replaced by a more punitive, contingent system, deeply entwined with the market-centred philosophy of neoliberalism and paternalism of social conservatism (Parker and Fopp 2005; Henman and Marston 2008; Schram, Soss, Houser and Fording 2010).

This system of governance is unequivocally focused on moving income support recipients from 'welfare to work' through government sanctioned job-search training and eventual employment and off income support, wherever possible. In line with the OECD's recommendations, current measures target and regulate recipients, restrict eligibility to benefits and enforce strict 'work availability' requirements with significant financial sanctions (by suspension of payments) for non-compliance (Lantz and Marston 2012). At the heart of this policy frame, the neoliberal workfare project takes an active stance, emphasising the need to instil specific work-ready competencies and the adoption of productivist ideologies in order to

assimilate individuals into market relations (Bessant, Watts, Dalton and Smyth 2006). These strategies focus primarily on administrative and compliance factors, with an emphasis on measurable technocratic procedures, managerial risk management, investigation strategies and intrusive surveillance practices.

The former Labor government¹ stated in its 2011-12 Federal Budget that it sought, in the words of then Prime Minister Gillard, to end the 'corrosive' effects of perceived welfare dependency through 'requiring responsibility', noting the importance of the 'dignity and purpose of work' (Gillard 2011: 5). The Labor policy paradigm, following closely in the footsteps of previous Conservative administrations, requires individual responsibility and progress towards 'self-reliance', enacting punitive responses to control those perceived as failing to contribute economically. In an inversion of the much feared 'nanny state', a 'new paternalism' emerges through income management in targeted areas of substantial economic and social disadvantage, underpinned by a costly, distrustful and authoritarian surveillance, reporting and sanctioning apparatus (Mead 1997; Buckmaster 2011; Buckmaster and Ey 2012). The absence of trust, particularly of Indigenous communities and claimants, is central to the operation of a paternalist welfare state. This is despite a strong measure of 'social trust' (Stolle 2001: 13) between government and governed being a 'precondition for civic engagement' and the kinds of 'active citizenship' often required and promoted for Indigenous Australians, particularly those living in geographically remote communities (Job 2005: 5).

Instead, a central strategy has been to 'support or induce the adoption of more responsible behaviours in particular communities by, for example, placing conditions on eligibility for welfare payments or on how welfare payments may be spent' (Buckmaster 2011: 1). These measures are an indication of successive Labor and Conservative governments' ideological commitment to the role of personal behavioural change, rather than increasing income support rates, in overcoming disadvantage. It is notable that several of the measures involve interventions in identified disadvantaged communities. This reflects heightened interest on the part of the former Labor government in 'location based initiatives' or programs targeting 'cluster groups' in particular geographical locations (Buckmaster 2011: 3), in an attempt to end the spectre of welfare dependency (for which no conclusive definition exists) through surveillance and other strategies of enforcement on 'disengaged youth' and also 'long-term welfare recipients' (Chouinard and Crooks 2005; Engels 2006; Australian National Audit Office 2011: 47; 2013).

The turn to a 'new paternalism' in Australia follows a similar recasting of social welfare from a matter of rights to a justification of the 'close supervision of the poor' (Mead 1997: 1) in a number of countries. Underway since the fall of the Whitlam Labor Government of 1972-75, through the years of successive economically rationalist attempts to reduce social welfare expenditure (Pusey 1991) in the Fraser Liberal Government (1975-1983) and the Hawke, then Keating Labor Governments (1983-1996), it can be discerned in Australian policy enactments around 'mutual obligation' and 'self reliance' for example, in the McClure Report (2000). In arguing that the success of welfare reform be judged by reductions in the number of jobless families and the proportion of the working age population reliant on various forms of income support, the report allowed the (Conservative) Howard Liberal National coalition government (1996-2007) to validate an increasingly revanchist regime of 'welfare reform' wherein self reliance at the individual and community level was the required outcome (McClure 2000; Carney 2011). Public policy maxims extolled the virtues of 'self reliance' and the creation of partnerships between government and non-government agencies and certain communities, with the state as broker and occasional friend, rather than the provider of services (Rose 2000; Tomlinson 2003). In such a harsh policy context those experiencing poverty are conceived as 'culpable actors' at risk of 'moral hazard' (Mead 1997: 19). The increasing stigmatisation and criminalisation of welfare claimants, invokes the exclusionary process of 'adiaphorisation'. This stripping away of moral criteria proceeds to such an extent that the concept of 'welfare' becomes loaded, not with compassion, but with fear and loathing of a criminally indolent

¹ Led by Rudd, 2007-10, Gillard, 2010-13 and Rudd again in 2013, until the September Federal election when a Conservative, Abbott-led government came to power.

welfare dependent class, for whom punishment and the withdrawal of benefits becomes a 'firm but fair' course of policy action, to protect the goodly virtues of the 'deserving' poor (Bauman 1998: 80).

The work ethic is thus deployed coercively to chastise the unemployed, notwithstanding that a social reality in which there is enough secure and decently paid work for all has ceased and is unlikely to return in any concrete way. As Bauman (1998: 80) observes:

[f]or the affluent part of the world and the affluent sections of well-off societies, the work ethic is a one-sided affair. It spells out the duties of those who struggle with survival; it says nothing about the duties of those who rose above mere survival and went on to more elevated, loftier concerns. In particular, it denies the dependency of the first upon the second, and so releases the second from responsibility for the first.

An 'older' paternalism can be identified in Foucault's (1981: 37) concept of 'pastoral power' in the sense of governing, punishing and 'helping' the poor along prescribed behavioural pathways, connecting with contemporary new paternalist concerns about entitlements to welfare benefits, dependency and behaviour (Henman and Adler 2003). A 'new' paternalism in social policy, and social welfare in particular, builds on the lineage of 'pastoral power', allowing the powerful in society to take a tough line in respect of alleged welfare dependency (Tomlinson 2013). The exercise of surveillant authority over the domain of public welfare demonstrates the new paternalism of 'government as by a benign parent' and 'the notion that those in positions of power have, just as in the relationship between parents and children, the right and the obligation to overrule the preferences of those deemed incapable of knowing their true interests' (Thomas and Buckmaster 2010: 2). The hallmarks of this form of new paternalism are the (over) promotion of personal responsibility and self reliance, the enforcement of desired social values and compliant behaviour and the harnessing of surveillance technologies with enhanced functionality, to monitor public welfare programs (Mead 1997; Yeatman 2000; Mendes 2012). In demarcating the rise of 'new' paternalism, it is acknowledged that this development coexists alongside a number of contested understandings of 'good' and 'bad' paternalism. Arguably, another kind of 'orthodox' rights based paternalism informed the very construction of the post war welfare state, particularly in the areas of education and provision of a range of social services and benefits (Kennedy 1982; Thomas and Buckmaster 2010; Cunningham and Cunningham 2012).

Nonetheless, I argue that the key differences between 'old' and 'new' paternalism lie in the move to secure behavioural change through the conditional provision of benefits and substantial and ongoing 'investment' in intrusive surveillance infrastructure such as the BasicsCard by successive Australian Governments (Thomas and Buckmaster 2010; Billings 2011; Carney 2011). Thus surveillance mechanisms of the kinds discussed in this article act as a conduit through which 'the preventative-surveillance state' becomes not only 'broader, more interventive and more regulatory' (Parton 2008: 166), but also deeply embedded in the daily minutia of life for people attempting to survive on welfare.

Surveillance

A number of Western democratic countries can be understood as 'surveillance societies' (Lyon 2001). The nature of the surveillance is complex and far-reaching, and needs to be set in the broadest context of all everyday human acts (Bauman and Lyon 2013). Surveillance as information gathering and storage is not a feature only of modernity or post modernity; following King William's Domesday Book of 1085, a 'simple and ancient' form of data compilation may be discerned in England in the 1500s, in taxation, census and early poor law administration. This inaugural moment in the creation of the surveillance state, while delineating limited rights to private property and parish poor relief, through the exercise of 'pastoral power' (Foucault 1981: 47), also built a provisional infrastructure for social control, for example, over religious orders, 'heretics, devils and witches' (Marx 2003: 17), the categorisation and sanctioning of the

‘deserving and undeserving’ poor (Kennedy 1982: 153), and also workers organising for better pay and conditions (Lyon 2002).

Over time and in often haphazard ways, the urbanisation of England and much of Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries led to myriad forms of paper based surveillance in census information, registries of populations for taxation, conscription, citizenship, public health and more (Marx 2003; Henman and Adler 2003). The emergence of professions such as teaching and social work can be identified in this period, along with increased interest in questions and concerns about social life in the wake of upheavals due to poverty, disease, civil unrest and war (Weiner 1984). The urban context provided a complex seam of material upon which the state could act, including the study of poverty, supported by the gathering and use of statistics as an evidence base for measures to oversee, control and assist the poor, enshrined in Poor Law legislation where the term ‘mutual obligation’ emerges (Williams 1973; Checkland and Checkland 1974; Novak 1997; Byrne 2001; Henman and Adler 2003).

The use of surveillance by welfare and other authorities is not therefore a new phenomenon in social governance, and in Australia there has been a marked increase in the surveillance of jobseekers, intrain since the late 1990s (Parker and Fopp 2005). This includes Job Capacity Assessments for people with disabilities to establish their capacity to work and Activity Agreements outlining recipient’s contractual obligations and possible sanctions if they fail to comply (Lantz and Marston 2012). Such gathering of information achieves a virtual solid form as a ‘data body’ (Stalder 2002: 120). This body of information goes everywhere with the consuming citizen, carrying a weight of detail in its ‘data trailings’ to convey, for example, a track record of personal finance to a lending institution, or a snapshot of health records to a physician (Henman and Marston 2008: 188). On arrival anywhere, the citizen has already been ‘measured and classified’ and also ‘sorted’ (Lyon 2003: 6) and is treated according to the criteria ‘connected with the profile that represents us’ (Stalder 2002: 125). In describing the emergence of a ‘preventative-surveillance state’, Wrennall (2010: 314) notes the creation of a data double, or ‘the virtual self created by dataveillance’, whereby the ‘virtual self, emptied of real content, becomes a mirror for surveillance, filled with whatever conjectural information surveillance has placed there’ (Wrennall 2010: 317; Clarke 1994).

Surveillance is multi-faced, for the infrastructure which records ‘private’ telephone conversations and matches client data across welfare and policing agencies, can also protect liberty, support social justice and encourage ‘participation in political life’ (Lyon 2002: 4). The extent of seemingly altruistic surveillance applications means that its negative aspects are frequently disputed or minimised by advocates for greater surveillance powers (Lyon 2007: 4). This may be in part because the phenomenon of routine mass surveillance largely coincides with the emergence of the ‘risk society’. In Beck’s formulation, this comes about when the ‘social, political, ecological, and individual risks created by the momentum of innovation elude increasingly the control and protective institutions of industrial society’ (1992: 27). Importantly, and as this article indicates, the surveillance gaze does not fall evenly on the citizens of most societies, as Norris and Armstrong (1999) established in relation to the CCTV surveillance of urban poor young people, and as Beck (1992: 35) notes, ‘like wealth, risks adhere to the class pattern, only inversely: wealth accumulates at the top, risks at the bottom. To that extent, risks seem to strengthen, not to abolish, the class society. Poverty attracts an unfortunate abundance of risks’.

Writing presciently in 1973, Rule makes some important comments on developments to come in surveillance, risk and data management in contemporary societies (1973: 319):

Total surveillance, under anything like the present state of technology and social organization is impossible. One simply cannot envisage how it would be feasible for any regime literally to watch everyone all of the time, to digest the resulting information continually and fully, and to remain eternally ready to respond. It is possible, however, to imagine what one might call a ‘central clearing house’ for mass surveillance and control,

without straining the limits of present-day technology and organizational skills. Under such a system, all major agencies of mass surveillance and control within a single society would render unlimited assistance to one another. Information generated in the relationship between the client and any one system would automatically be available to any other system.

The era of total surveillance has perhaps not yet been reached, but much of the technology merely imagined by Rule (1973) either exists now or soon will. The transition from historical forms of surveillance to 'new' data based surveillance, takes shape in the 'scrutiny through the use of technical means to extract or create personal or group data, whether from individuals or contexts' and includes aerial drones, DNA analysis, data profiling, matching and mining, automatic number plate recognition cameras, CCTV with enhanced definition and predictive functionality and also imaging and scanning capabilities (Marx 2002, 2003: 2; though see also Kruger, and Edmond and San Roque, this issue). Regimes of new surveillance are undertaken at a distance with 'sponge-like absorbency and laser-like specificity' and encourage or require self surveillance and the surveillance of others, for example in the workplace and local community (Marx 2003: 3).

These burgeoning surveillance processes, practices and techniques reflect a range of contradictions within neoliberal workfare policy. Henman and Marston (2008: 194) note that '...the liberal principles of freedom of choice and individual liberties are suspended for populations receiving certain forms of welfare'. Mandatory workfare programs suggest that welfare recipients are not 'responsible' or trustworthy enough to become self-sufficient independent workers on their own instead; they require constant supervision and surveillance from sceptical and often hostile authorities (Henman and Adler 2003; Graham and Wood 2003).

While researchers argue that surveillance is not inherently designed to perpetuate inequality, they also note that in contemporary societies, where everyone is subject to some forms of surveillance 'not everyone is monitored in the same way or for the same purposes' (Gilliom 2001: 42; Henman 2004; Haggerty and Ericson 2006). Welfare surveillance scholars posit that surveillance is more than just watching, it is 'a calculated practice for managing and manipulating human behaviour' (Henman 2004: 176). Of welfare surveillance in Canada, Maki (2011: 51) argues that '...surveillance is not benign and, in the service of the neoliberal state, acts as a direct assault on the poor'. Importantly, Maki (2011: 51) issues a challenge to the discipline of Surveillance Studies and what she suggests is a 'general consensus' that 'surveillance is not inherently evil' or 'designed to perpetuate inequality'. There is arguably a deficit in the study of surveillance due to the lack of critical work on the possible effects of being the subject (willing or otherwise) of surveillance as Gilliom (2006: 126) contends:

A tour of the field suggests that we have been particularly good at studying the watchers—the police, the CCTV operators etc.—but not so good at the necessarily messier, less institutionalized, and exploratory but absolutely crucial job of studying the watched—the real people and real bodies who are the subjects of these systems...Until we are able to generate sufficient research to make plausible sense of how differently situated people—welfare mothers, prisoners, students, middle-class professionals—speak of and respond to their surveillance settings, I would argue that we are fundamentally unable to define the powers of surveillance or, indeed, to devise a meaningful account of what surveillance is.

While not necessarily demonstrative of malign intent, surveillance practices tend more often than not to 'coagulate more heavily on the more disadvantaged members of society' (Henman and Marston 2008: 201) and therefore different forms of surveillance affect different populations. For example, the affluent may choose to be involved in market research, while in contrast the poor, when accessing their entitlement

to benefits and services, encounter ‘invasive scrutiny of their purchases and the discipline of their behaviour’ (Monahan 2008: 220). Thus the central tenet of neoliberalism in the privatisation of public programs and services, the re-scripting of citizens as consumers and the corresponding increase in social control mechanisms, reads differently for those who do not neatly fit into the category of legitimate ‘consumer-citizen’ such as people on welfare payments (Monahan 2008: 219). An example is found in social work with children and families, specifically in child protection work in the UK, where child protection has arguably, become a ‘Trojan Horse’ for systems of surveillance targeted on individuals and families deemed ‘to be dangerous, troublesome or dependent’ (Lonne, Parton, Thomson and Harries 2009: 72). The financial outlays on surveillance through information sharing between state and linked agencies, data matching to detect social security overpayments, database development and maintenance and the ongoing assessment of families, have reached the point where some of the most vulnerable families ‘receive child protection surveillance rather than the practical help that could eliminate any risks that they may pose’ (Henman and Adler 2003; Henman 2004; Wrennall 2010: 314).

Institutionalising Welfare Surveillance—The Australian BasicsCard as a case study

The BasicsCard is a Personal Identification Number (PIN) protected Electronic Funds Transfer at Point of Sale (EFTPOS) card manufactured by a private contractor for the Australian Government, as a central plank in its policy program of income management for claimants receiving a range of social security payments (Australian National Audit Office 2011). The BasicsCard is a geographically targeted, individualised surveillance program originating in the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) explicitly aimed at addressing behavioural change through a scheme of (mostly) compulsory income management. The NTER is still deeply controversial, but ongoing, with the then Gillard led Labor government in 2010 extending most of the NTER provisions for a further 10 years through the ‘Stronger Futures’ legislation (Buckmaster and Ey 2012). The legislation is seen by O’Halloran of the National Welfare Rights Network thus: ‘The passage of the “Stronger Futures” legislation makes us a weaker nation. Ninety per cent of people under compulsory income management in the Northern Territory are Indigenous which should be a matter of national shame’ (Australian Council of Social Service 2012). The original NTER required the suspension of the 1975 Racial Discrimination Act for income management to be imposed on Indigenous people, treating 73 communities differently on the grounds of race from other Australians (Buckmaster, Margarey and Spooner 2012). Income management was later rebadged as ‘New Income Management’ when the Racial Discrimination Act was restored by the Labor government and (new) income management became an apparently ‘non-discriminatory program’ with ‘Participation-Parenting and ‘Vulnerable Welfare Recipient’ features (Buckmaster, Ey and Klapdor 2012: 2).

For some observers, the NTER remains a thinly disguised program of oppression linked to historical tensions around child removal and dispossession of land. While ostensibly combating welfare dependency, child sexual abuse, alcohol fuelled violence and neglect, the NTER arguably undermines Indigenous self-determination, collective structures of governance and land rights as well as attacking welfare, per se (Dean 2009; Wrennall 2010; Cox 2011; Buckmaster and Ey 2012). As Tomlinson (2013: 1) notes, it also brought about a wider process of ‘marginalising various sections of society which can in turn be denigrated—the unemployed called dole bludgers, disability pensioners become malingerers, single parents become welfare mums who brought their problems on themselves, the original owners of this land are converted into drunks and paedophiles...’.

Responsible behaviour on the part of Indigenous and non-Indigenous welfare claimants (or ‘customers’ in Centrelink speak) is ‘induced’ with the BasicsCard holding a percentage of a welfare claimant’s entitlements to be spent only on ‘approved’ items (Buckmaster 2011: 2). However, as locals in Alice Springs discovered, it can buy fireworks in one store but not schoolbags in another, suggesting anomalies in the definition of ‘essential’ items (Martin 2013). The proportion of income ‘managed-quarantined’ is 50 per cent, but may be up to 70 per cent. Generally, 100 per cent of any lump sum payments (such as the

Baby Bonus, a welfare payment to low income parents) are quarantined. Prohibited items include alcohol, pornography and tobacco products, cash outs, gift cards or vouchers, and all refunds go back to the BasicsCard. The card can be cancelled or suspended at any time by Centrelink without warning and cannot be used at an ATM or for mail order, internet, telephone or direct debit based transactions (Australian Council of Social Service 2010; Department of Human Services 2013).

With only specific shops licensed by Centrelink as 'Approved BasicsCard Merchants' having agreed to terms and conditions, which include regular audits and maintaining customer transaction records confidentially for at least two years, many small retailers are currently not included in the scheme, which forces welfare recipients to shop at the larger retail chains such as Coles and Woolworths and other national supermarket chains and their subsidiaries. These are the very same organisations that have significant purchasing control over small businesses, local suppliers and producers (Buckmaster 2011). A minimum spend of \$5 may be required by an approved merchant and this causes problems where the customer does not have this balance on their card, or if they wish to spend less than this amount, as they could with cash. Research has been limited as to the operations and impacts of the BasicsCard despite its continued expansion. One of the only reports specifically examining the experiences of more than 180 women on income management in the Northern Territory (NT) reveals a number of significant problems. The majority of participants wanted to exit the BasicsCard for a range of reasons including a lack of understanding as to the purpose of the program and why they are on it, a perception that both Centrelink and their community do not trust or respect them and consider them to be incapable of managing their money and family's lives, that they, and their children, were losing important money management skills while Centrelink took over the payment of their bills, that their children were being taught to rely on government welfare and also the perception that the BasicsCard was specifically intended for Indigenous or African migrant families alone (Equality Rights Alliance 2011).

Research participants also argued that the BasicsCard shaped their spending in negative ways, noting that the big supermarkets, rather than smaller shops, accepted the BasicsCard. This was an issue for people looking for Halal butchers or Asian grocers, buying clothes for school-aged children and accessing prescription medications. Some of the smaller shops had cheaper options, but the BasicsCard did not allow them to shop there. The geographical remoteness and harshness of many NT communities also exacerbates equity issues as the distance between stores, banks and welfare agencies is hundreds of kilometres and the cost and difficulty of travelling between remote communities is high. Participants also noted that they had no avenue to leave the scheme or means of redress (Equality Rights Alliance 2011).

In some communities Indigenous women in particular have found certain aspects of income management useful in restricting the amount of cash available for family members to spend on alcohol, thereby reducing incidences of violent predation in the name of dubious financial and familial obligations. For Langton, a distinguished Indigenous academic and commentator, compulsory income management, although a drastic measure, is broadly justifiable when set against the many years of neglectful policies that have seen the daily life of Indigenous women and children in particular sink to levels in some remote communities barely consistent with human decency (Langton 2007, 2013). To a limited extent it might be the case that for some women, the daily grind of violence and harassment (usually by men, but also from children and young people), to obtain cash for gambling, alcohol and consumer goods, far exceeds the bureaucratic and paternalistic impost of income management. This line of argument, however, fails to acknowledge fully the paucity (or complete absence) of basic support services for women and children in many remote locations throughout Australia. It also undervalues the resourcefulness exhibited in desperate circumstances, pooling finances to provide for extended family members, such as sharing BasicsCards to meet legitimate needs when visitors arrive at short notice (Cox 2011; Equality Rights Alliance 2011).

The experience of being compulsorily income managed for Indigenous women and women from other diverse ethnic backgrounds is contradictory and multi-layered. Examples include an African migrant in

Darwin with seven children for whom the major areas of expenditure are sporting clubs and school canteens that do not accept the BasicsCard and also the mother whose teenage sons call the BasicsCard Freecall balance telephone line repeatedly on benefit payment day in order to harass her for the purchase of games and clothes, 'as soon as the money is on the card' (Equality Rights Alliance 2011: 20). Additionally, there is the 'stigma of shame' at being income managed against one's will and having to produce the BasicsCard (participating stores have BasicsCard stickers on display at the cash registers), and possibly be judged as yet 'another one' who cannot manage their own affairs (Cox 2011: 40):

Rather than enabling Aboriginal families to better manage their money the process of compulsory quarantining was seen as reinforcing beliefs that Aboriginal people were not able to manage their lives. This loss of autonomy about where to shop and what to buy was seen as degrading and shameful. Importantly it did not focus on whether people received enough money to be able to budget appropriately or provide skills in budget management.

Here are some of the key critiques of compulsory, imposed income management; that it is costly on a range of fronts, it infers that Indigenous people and their culture are 'exclusively responsible for problems within their communities' (Yu, Duncan and Grey 2008: 19), it leaves the problems of poverty and disadvantage largely untouched, and has a deep resonance with earlier times of paternalistic control and surveillance by mission clergy or a colonial administrator, as an Aboriginal community leader reflects (cited in Cox 2011: 39-40):

I think it's an infringement on people's civil liberties that government has to manage and be involved in all those minute aspects of people's day-to-day living. My mother's book for child endowment was not in her house but hers, and those of all the other Aboriginal mothers around the country, were held by the Superintendent of Native Welfare and she had to explain why she needed the money and how she was going to use it, etcetera, before he would let her have that month's coupon.

The former Labor government appeared to select and 'cherry pick' evidence accentuating the positive aspects of the BasicsCard, yet this so called data rates at the 'bottom of the evidence hierarchy' (Billings 2011; Cowling 2011: 7). Local narratives that tell of only slight improvements, compounded by new and severe forms of complexity, harassment and powerlessness, are less roundly acknowledged or celebrated. With limited critical research, the decision to extend from the heavily criticised NTER and rebadge as (new) income management into metropolitan trial areas went somewhat unnoticed. The five 'Place Based Income Management' locations included, from July 1 2012, Bankstown, (New South Wales), Logan and Rockhampton (Queensland), Playford, (South Australia) and Shepparton (Victoria) at an estimated cost for each participant of \$4,600. The former government targeted these areas because of their 'entrenched disadvantage' (Buckmaster and Ey 2012: 3). The BasicsCard scheme, (supported by both the newly installed Abbott led Liberal National government and the now Labor opposition) comes at significant cost. Estimates indicate the trials will cost in excess of \$117 million over 5 years. The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) has noted that the NTER scheme (total expenditure of \$402 million over 5 years), covering about 20,000 individuals, costs between \$6,600-\$7,900 per person. ACOSS argues that this money would be far better spent on genuine welfare reform such as increasing some benefit rates, expanding employment opportunities and investing in housing, health facilities and community infrastructure (ACOSS 2010, 2012, 2013).

There is little credible evidence that income management meets the intended welfare-to-work outcomes, including 'better management of finances in the long term', moving people into employment, or reducing unemployment or long term reliance on welfare payments. For example, research on nutrition in NT communities found that in the 10 stores surveyed, 'income management independent of the government

stimulus payment appears to have had no beneficial effect on tobacco and cigarette sales, soft drink or fruit and vegetable sales' (Brimblecombe, McDonnell, Barnes, Garnggulkpuy Dhurrkay, Thomas and Bailie 2010: 549). Income management may also lead to a new set of complex social and other problems, as the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the Northern Territory or AMSANT (2010: 49) suggests:

The compulsory quarantining of income of Aboriginal welfare recipients will have significant negative effects on the mental health and social functioning of individuals and communities—including children. These are serious health consequences in their own right and will have serious, harmful impacts on the physical health of young people and adults across the life span.

A number of other reports and reviews raise clear concerns about compulsory income management (Priest and Cox 2010) and question the positive benefits claimed by the former government, as expressed by Jenny Macklin, then Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services, Indigenous Affairs and Disability Reform (including income management): 'It ensures that money is available for life essentials, and provides a tool to stabilise people's circumstances and ease immediate financial stress' (Macklin cited in Karvelas 2011). This assertion runs counter to the advice of her own NTER Review Committee, in particular its recommendation in the Yu Report that the compulsory income management scheme should cease, and be replaced by a combination of voluntary and targeted trigger-based systems in cases of child abuse and neglect (Yu et al. 2008: 47).

The data captured about purchasing 'choices' made by BasicsCard holders is substantial, and both the former and current government seem inattentive to conventional expectations of privacy; information about how and where this data is retained and how it may be accessed and by whom, requires further investigation. While at the time of writing there is no information available as to the current or proposed data capture functionalities of the latest version of the BasicsCard, the terms and conditions facilitate function creep in stipulating that the personal data of card holders may be shared with other agencies, 'information about the use of your BasicsCard may be disclosed to regulatory or *law enforcement* agencies' (Department of Human Services 2013, emphasis added), and further that, '[t]he department will collect, use and disclose personal information about you relating to the use of your BasicsCard for the purposes of managing the operation and use of your BasicsCard and your Income Management Account and giving effect to these terms and conditions of use' (Department of Human Services 2013).

An example of the potentially oppressive effects of data gathering lies in the administration of the food stamps scheme in the United States, illustrating the capacity of welfare systems to increase the surveillance and consequent marginalisation of welfare claimants. Like so many so called 'welfare reforms', the Welfare Reform Act (1996) started life with the stated intention of combating fraud and secondary aims of reducing the stigma associated with the receipt of food stamps, as well as making life 'simpler' and more 'convenient' for financially poor women, the overwhelming recipients of food stamps in the US (Monahan 2009). The vehicle for delivering this welfare reform was the electronic benefit transfer or EBT system, with an electronic card much like an ATM card taking the place of the actual food stamps. The EBT system for which the card acts as a virtual informant, tracks spending data such as times, locations and items purchased, rendering this data available for examination by case workers and other officials as desired, often resulting in hostile interviews for claimants (Monahan 2009). While welfare surveillance may pose as an objective and rational practice, it is instead (in this example) 'objectifying in a very restricted and disciplinary sense. Even if women were not the primary targets of such surveillance systems, by filtering out social context and objectifying others, these systems enforce masculinized representations of social experience and value' (Monahan 2009: 294). It can be argued that key neoliberal and gender based assumptions and discourses are embedded in such surveillance systems, solidifying relations of power and domination, aided by a technological determinism serving in the main, male

dominated corporate interests raking over the daily transactions of the poor (Rule 1973; Boyd 2004; Monahan 2009; Maki 2011).

Interestingly, the UK government inspired by the apparent success of income management and the BasicsCard in Australia, is considering imposing a version of a similar, Oyster (transport) style card on up to 120,000 families identified officially as 'troubled' (Hope 2012). The Work and Pensions Secretary, Iain Duncan Smith, wants to prevent the purchase by parents in such families of alcohol, tobacco and other substances. In the words of British Prime Minister David Cameron, 'I have an ambition, before the end of this Parliament, we will turn around the lives of 120,000 most troubled families. We need more action, too, on the families that some people call 'problem', others call 'troubled', the ones that everyone in their neighbourhood knows and often avoids' (Hope 2012).

The current UK social policy environment of deep cuts to public expenditure and services and severe welfare-to-work reforms have been spurred on by apparent widespread, 'citizen initiated' support for denying welfare benefits, including public housing, to people involved (but not convicted) in the 2011 riots (Carney 2011; Levitas 2012). This delineation of 'target populations', singled out for conditional welfare, divides and 'sorts' individuals (and some 'dysfunctional' communities) into categorisations such as 'disengaged youth', 'single mothers', 'troubled' and those considered more active as 'jobseekers' and 'good' citizens, in becoming 'self regulating subjects' (Schram et al. 2010: 230; Lyon 2007). The propensity for welfare states to punish the 'undeserving' poor has been in evidence since the Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1601 and even the architect of the post war welfare state, Lord William Beveridge, proposed compulsory retraining camps for the long term unemployed and was 'much taken with the whip-lash of starvation' in motivating the unemployed to take any job (Kennedy 1982: 204). In this respect, the absence of trust and confidence by governments in people on welfare, exemplified in compulsory 'income management' schemes such as the BasicsCard and the ramping up of dataveillance and conditionality, is akin to pouring old wine from new bottles. In this case the old wine is infused with suspicion and loathing of the poor, while the new bottles are the surveillance, control and monitoring apparatuses constructed at massive public expense, (or so called investment) to accomplish the new paternalist governance project of early 21st century, post Global Financial Crisis, austerity themed welfare (Carney 2011; Levitas 2012).

Conclusion

This article suggests that the neoliberal ideological framework driving income management, welfare reform and welfare-to-work programs in Australia is punitive and controlling. Changes to benefits for single parents enacted by the former (Labor) government, moving over 83,000 to a lower, conditional *Newstart* (unemployment benefit), had the stated rationale of 'incentivising' recipients to engage with the job market (and the less trumpeted aim of cutting social expenditure in a failed attempt to achieve a budget surplus) but ignored ample evidence that many claimants, women especially, already worked, 'earning' their poverty through low pay and poor conditions (Karvelas 2013; ACOSS 2013).

These changes, along with a refusal to increase the rate of *Newstart*, signal that the situation of those receiving welfare entitlements is ever more marginal, with the recent Federal election ejecting the Labor government and returning a Conservative, Liberal National party coalition to power, with new Prime Minister Abbott already committed to ending entitlements to welfare and extending income management and the BasicsCard, albeit with reduced costs (Martin 2013). Alongside these economic, political and electoral cycles systems of surveillance continue to be expanded, and performance measurement and assessment strategies, investigation and surveillance practices reinforce a deficit-oriented framework focused on perceived individual or family failings (Maki 2011). The commodification of data is now a substantial industry, highly influential in persuading governments of all political hues of the alleged benefits of dataveillance in most policy areas. It is clear that the intense shift to a more technological surveillance oriented system deserves closer attention, particularly in the ways apparently rational and

ideologically ‘neutral’ systems of surveillance mesh so adroitly with punitive welfare regimes (Wrennall 2010).

The surveillance of people on social welfare benefits and services funded or provided through the welfare state is far more intrusive than for those on fiscal welfare, with benefits received through taxation and occupational welfare, with benefits gained through employment (Henman and Marston 2008). Moreover, targeting personal behaviour by withholding income payments is inconsistent with a rights-based approach to income support that had been a feature of welfare policy and ideas about social citizenship in Australia since World War II, with the introduction of unemployment benefits by the Curtin (Labor) Government in 1944, ending the practice of applying for State Government ‘sustenance’ in food and blankets, from police stations (ACOSS 2010). This post war settlement around employment and welfare policies became increasingly brittle following the demise of the Whitlam Labor Government in 1975 and throughout successive Conservative and Labor administrations (Kennedy 1982; Pusey 1991; Bessant et al. 2006). Given the pervasiveness of all forms of surveillance and that ‘cyberspace is not a flat, multilateral plane and the nodes of the network are not all equal’ (Fitzpatrick 2000: 390) arguably, the classic formulation by Marshall and Bottomore (1950) of social, political and civil citizenship rights now needs to take into account a form of *virtual* citizenship rights—or rights over one’s virtual, data self, analogous to rights and protections concomitant with being a physically constituted being (Dornan and Hudson 2003).

Australia is still, at the time of writing, the only country in the world to impose this type of income management on some of its poorest citizens (Thomas and Buckmaster 2010). While the high tide of welfare surveillance is seemingly irresistible—perhaps even leading to a national identity card—resistance is necessary and powerful and has been an aspect of welfare in Australia since European settlement, with recipients attempting to navigate and subvert an often labyrinthine and administratively perverse system in order to survive (Kennedy 1982; Bryson 1992). The Australian Council of Social Services is calling for the abolition of compulsory income management and the savings made directed to community development projects and greater funding of mental health and other support services (ACOSS 2013). *Rollback the Intervention* is an Indigenous protest group also resisting compulsory income management and other features of the NTER (<http://rollbacktheintervention.wordpress.com>). In this context, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people form a growing ‘precariat’ whose circumstances and prospects are entirely tenuous but whose rising anger at massive global and local inequalities holds the potential for a progressive agenda for widespread social change (Standing 2011, 2012).

The imposition of the BasicsCard is likely to have perverse effects. It is a clear example of a system implemented with little adequate research related to the effectiveness or otherwise of income management, despite governments consistently emphasising the importance of evidence-based policy making (Cox 2011; Buckmaster and Ey 2012). Administrative (and other) costs are high and the question persists as to whether it is possible to encourage or ‘induce’ people to become self-reliant if they are not trusted to exercise real control over vital aspects of their lives. Spending up to \$7,900 to income manage people subsisting on \$35 a day is highly discriminatory and counter-productive social policy (ACOSS 2013). Flexible and genuinely *voluntary* forms of income management, alongside increases in benefit rates and the provision of and investment in, a range of other community based support services would be far more effective in addressing poverty and rebuilding trust between all levels of government and citizens. Randa Kattan, Executive Director of Arab Council Australia wryly suggests that, ‘From the bush to Bankstown, people do not need Income Management. They need job opportunities, higher incomes and improved social services’ (ACOSS 2013: 2). So-called ‘welfare reform’ policies that are hastily conceived and rolled out without mindful and adequate attention to the difficulties of local implementation are most likely to fail, being experienced by welfare recipients as oppressive and vindictive (Priest and Cox 2010; Mendes 2012; Karvelas 2013).

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