

WELSH BACCALAUREATE

Advanced

Individual Project

University of South Wales –
Department of Sociology – The
Family

University of
South Wales
Prifysgol
De Cymru

Brief – The Family

Families are a cultural universal, but sociologists show that our ideas about families vary across cultures and societies. How government policy, too, affects families, and in particular to offset the challenging conditions experienced in some households, is a very topical focus for a research project.

While most of us think of the family as a positive thing, its effects on society are quite complex. On the one hand, a good family life is one of the things which many of us will cherish most. Families are life-enhancing in ways which are hard or impossible to find elsewhere. This suggests that societies should find ways of promoting families and facilitating good family relationships, so that the individuals within them will flourish. On the other hand, families are also sources of harm, in various kinds of ways. Family relationships can be neglectful, or abusive. Some of the worst things that people do, they do to the people closest to them. If you come from a family background where others have committed offences, you yourself are far more likely than others to end up in the criminal justice system.

We don't choose or earn our family backgrounds. Yet they can seem sources of great unfairness – privileging some children over others, for example, or putting some at far greater risk of harm or disadvantage. Though we'd like to think that every child, born to every family, has an equal chance in life, we know that this is never really the case. Government policies, in Wales and the UK, have mixed, often limited results in seeking to address this.

Comparative studies of particular government policies on families in different countries demonstrate the varying influence of cultural differences in ideologies of justice and fairness. Policies on tackling child poverty or funding for childcare, for example, have been especially contested and on which it is possible to use a wide range of useful resources.

Contacts

<http://www.southwales.ac.uk/study/subjects/sociology/>

WELSH BACCALAUREATE

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Individual Project

University of South Wales –
Department of Sociology –
Language and Conflict

University of
South Wales
Prifysgol
De Cymru

Brief – Language and Conflict

The reporting of war and conflict features all too commonly in our daily news. Government policies, such as whether or not to send troops into a war zone, can provoke strong public reactions. Images, as is often said, speak more loudly than words – and these, too, can have a really important bearing on public response. The language of conflict, however, used to report conflict also conditions our responses.

By looking at the example of international conflict, phrases such as ‘surgical air strikes’ may appear to suggest minimal collateral damage or casualties, but the reality may be rather different. Yet the clinical and targeted image may lead people to support a course of action that they would not otherwise deem acceptable. One can also look at how international events can be ‘spun’ to increase public sense of insecurity, which in turn can make implementation of harder line policies more palatable. This has clear implications for our civil liberties. The media has a pivotal role in reinforcing and reproducing dominant hegemonic discourses, and in manufacturing consent.

Contacts

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WELSH BACCALAUREATE

Advanced

Individual Project

University of South Wales –
Department of Sociology –
Migration

University of
South Wales
Prifysgol
De Cymru

Brief – Migration

In the UK, few subjects generate as much sharp response as immigration. It regularly features in daily news reports and in the run-up to elections it is an issue which has the potential to make or break politicians. Over the last twenty years, it has gone from being a relatively low level public issue to being, with crime and security, one of the issues on which voters want to see governments take more action. The UK is not, however, exceptional. Immigration is a major public concern in many other European countries, as well as further afield, such as in the USA.

As reports of the plight of refugees fleeing the war in Syria so amply illustrate, sometimes people leave their countries because they feel they are being driven out by the prospect of threats to themselves and their families. This is what social scientists call a 'push' factor. In other contexts, some politicians, and some sections of the media, make repeated reference to people coming to the UK because migrants are, they claim, attracted by the prospect of better welfare benefits as well as higher wages. These are often referred as forms of 'pull factors' – things which are capable of attracting migrants to come to particular countries.

There are numerous factors which are seen to lie behind the movement of large numbers of people worldwide (the 'push' and 'pull'). Some of these factors have led to immigration becoming a controversial public issue, with public attitudes influenced by media reporting and government policies.

Contacts

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WELSH BACCALAUREATE

Advanced

Individual Project

University of South Wales –
Department of Sociology –
Global Peace-Making

University of
South Wales
Prifysgol
De Cymru

Brief – Global Peace-Making

Few things seem as universal or enduring as conflict. The means and circumstances might change, but war – between and within states – remains a constant feature of human social organisation. There are quite usually domestic reasons why conflicts may escalate, and deep-seated reasons different parties' grievances may find struggle to reach agreements. Very often, other countries have a vested interest in supporting different sides in such conflicts, as is the case in the civil war in Syria.

In the face of these complex circumstances, the 'international community' can help to bring about a cessation of conflict, but there is no prescribed route to success. In countries such as Afghanistan, Libya and Sudan, which have experienced ongoing and enduring conflict in recent years, researchers have argued that imposing western democratic models will struggle unless they connect with long-standing models of justice and law-making in these countries and take account sufficiently of the ethnic character of these territories.

Contacts

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