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Chapter 5

Localism and the ‘post-social’ governmentality

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“If there is such a thing as Cameronism¹, it is giving power away” (*The Economist*, 2009:39)

The 2010 General Election in the United Kingdom (UK) which failed to produce a majority vote for any single political party led to the formation of the first (in 60 years) Coalition Government made up of the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives. In taking office, they made ‘localism’ and ‘Big Society’ the central theme of their government, promising to: enable “a fundamental shift of power from Westminster to people”, “promote decentralisation and democratic engagement”, and “end the era of top-down government by giving new powers to local councils, communities, neighbourhoods and individuals” (HM Government, 2010a:11). In December 2010, this agenda appeared in the *Localism Bill* as the linchpin of government’s ‘Big Society’ policy. The Bill, which a year later became the *Localism Act 2011*, confirmed the Government’s intention to “devolve power, money, and knowledge to [...] elected local representatives, frontline public service professionals, social enterprises, charities, co-ops, community groups, neighbourhoods, and individuals” who are seen as “those best placed to find the best solutions to local needs” (HM Government, 2010b:4).

While the Coalition Government has given localism a strong political salience, it is wrong to assume that localism is their invention. On the contrary, localism in its various forms has been a long standing feature of British politics and public policy (Painter, *et al.*, 2011) and can be traced back to Edmund Burke (a founder of British conservatism) “who extolled the small platoons as the pillars of the state” (Crick, 2002: 497). The more recent calls for decentralisation surfaced during the former Labour Government (1997-2010). What was then called ‘the New Localist’ agenda (Stoker, 2004: 117) was captured in a speech by Alan Milburn, who became its champion in Tony Blair’s government. He stated that,

“We have reached the high water mark of the post-1997 centrally-driven target-based approach [...]. Reforms to enhance choice, diversify supply and devolve control are all now taking hold as the Government moves from a centralised command and control model to what has been called new localism [...]. Public services cannot be

run by diktat from the top down [...] accountability needs to move downwards and outwards to consumers and communities” (Milburn, March 2004: no page).

As Gerry Stoker (himself a keen supporter of what he calls progressive localism) suggests, beyond this enthusiasm for localism lay an attempt to pre-empt the Conservatives from using the term to attack “the control freakery, state paternalism and big spending plans” that characterised the Labour Government (Stoker, 2004: 117). Despite this observation, there is much continuity in government mentalities between the two administrations in advocating localism, and between governing through ‘the local’ and governing through ‘the community’. The latter became particularly pronounced in the 1990s and featured prominently in the Labour Government’s policies and programmes. It is, therefore, not surprising that Labour shadow ministers have fully embraced localism and want “to look at how local communities can be incentivised to think about development in their areas” and “feel that they’re being given the tools to shape what’s happening in their communities, including where housing would go” (*Planning*, 2013:14).

This continuity may be due to the populist appeal and the ‘warm glow’ of terms such as community and localism which tend to conjure up romantic images of small groups bound together through cultural and geographical ties and collaborate reciprocally and voluntarily to find local solutions for local problems; an image akin to Tönnies’ (1957) *Gemeinschaft*. But, there is more to localism than a mere populist rhetoric. Drawing on a Foucauldian perspective we argue that this form of localism, which is introduced from the top by the national government, is the spatial manifestation of ‘post-social’ technologies of neoliberal governmentality, which began with ‘the birth of the community’ a few decades ago (Rose, 1996). Localism complements the fragmentation of ‘the social’ into multiple communities with the fragmentation of ‘the national’ into multiple localities. It re-imagines the local as ‘the natural’ geography of ‘the community’ which itself is seen as the ‘natural’ articulation of collective life. We argue that, as the language of ‘the community’ weakens “the hold of ‘the social’ in our socio-political imagination” (Rose, 1996:353), so does the language of ‘the local’ weaken the hold of ‘the national’ in our socio-spatial imagination. Governing through ‘the local’ involves freeing localities to become responsible for their own fates and bear the consequences of their own conducts, yet in such a way that their action is aligned with governmental ends. Through a complex process of identification and responsabilisation, the local becomes both the *target* of governmental action and the voluntary *partner* of

government (Burchell, 1993). Furthermore, the local provides new space through which the subjectivity and identification of individuals are re-constituted. The process is enabled and regulated *at a distance* through technocratic and calculative technologies of agency and performance.

The chapter is organised in five sections. In section two, we describe Foucault's concept of governmentality and its two interrelated dimensions of political rationality and governmental technologies. In section three, we discuss liberalism and its contemporary manifestation in two distinct modes of government that emerged in the 20th century: welfarism and neoliberalism. Here, we pay particular attention to the ways in which neoliberal rationality understands, accounts for, and articulates the subjects of government and their freedom and responsibility. In section four, we focus on 'post-social' government to discuss the emergence of the community and localism, arguing that the government of 'big society' is not a social government. In conclusion (section five) we present a normative critique of neoliberal localism which, we argue, risks social Darwinism and technicisation of political space.

Governmentality

“It would not be going too far to say that today we are creatures of the state” (Miller, 2003:19).

A key contribution of Foucault's concept of governmentality is its departure from the kind of state-centred analyses of political authority that is reflected in the above statement and has preoccupied many social theorists and political philosophers. There has been an over-emphasis on the place of the state in political authority and its portrayal as a unified, all-powerful entity that is separated from two other unified and seemingly 'non-political' entities, the market and civil society (Rose and Miller, 1992). This perceived separation is in fact a legacy of liberalism itself whose emergence as an “art of governing” (Rose *et al.*, 2009:3) was based on a critique of the state intervention in individual freedoms. Classical liberals' critique of the state was shared by others. For example, Nietzsche considered the state as “the coldest of all cold monsters” that imposed its power on free and autonomous individuals. They believed that only “when the state ceases, does the man who is not superfluous begin” (Nietzsche, 1969:75). The suggested alternatives to the state span across a spectrum ranging from communitarianism at the one end, and libertarianism at the other. For the former governing is best left to the good will of the 'communities'. For the latter it is best

left to the invisible hand of the market. One romanticises a civil society based on reciprocity and voluntary cooperation; the other idealises a free market based on economic transactions. Both suggest that only in these state-free utopias life worthy of emancipated individuals can be made possible. Both assume that the absence of *the state* translates into the absence of *government*.

Foucault's notion of governmentality challenges the view that the state is a separate entity from society and is "the origin, animator, beneficiary, or terminal point of power" (Rose *et al.*, 2009:5). Referring to state-centric approaches, he famously suggested that despite the overthrow of absolute monarchies, "in the field of political thought we haven't yet cut off the kings' head" (Foucault, 1979a:88-89). By positioning the state *within* the wider field of government Foucault points to the existence of diverse forms of power in everyday life and its diffusion across multiple political and 'non-political' authorities. Defining government as 'the conduct of conducts' implies a continuum of power relations ranging from governing *the self* to governing *others* within which self-discipline is intertwined with the wider governmental regulation. It also implies that, "most individuals are not merely the subjects of power but play a part in its operations" (Rose and Miller 1992:174) simply through mundane practices of everyday lives. Thus, when Foucault speaks of the "governmentalization of the state" (Foucault, 1991a:103) he refers to the state as "a powerful, metaphysical effect" of distinctive governmental practices (Painter, 2010:1116)ⁱⁱ. In this chapter, we adopt this Foucauldian, non-essentialised understanding of the state as a specific, dynamic and historic way in which societal power relations are now discursively codified (Lemke, 2000: 11; Rose and Miller, 1992:177).

Rationalities and technologies of government

Making sense of the multiple ways in which our lives are connected to the aspirations of authorities requires an understanding of the act of governing (*gouverner*) and its rationalities (*mentalite*). It requires understanding the *art* of government, or 'governmentality' as Foucault puts it. He coined the concept in his lecture on 'genealogy of modern state' (on the 5th of April 1978 quoted in Lemke, 2000:2) to draw attention to the purpose of governmental action and the means by which it is achieved (Dean, 1999: 11; Lemke, 2000:5). He argued that governmentality is an "ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics, that allow the exercise of [this] very specific albeit complex form of power" (Foucault, 1979b:20). Governmentality focuses the attention on

political rationalities (ends) and technologies of government (means) and the intricate interdependencies between them as they are played out in specific places and times.

Foucault uses the term *rationality* not as a form of absolute or transcendental reason but rather to refer to its pragmatic, “instrumental and relative meaning” (Foucault, 1991b:79). It is about of rationalisation of particular practices. The focus is not on how practices conform to particular rationalities, but which kind of rationality they use and “how forms of rationality inscribe themselves in practices...” (Foucault, 1991b:79). For example, the move towards localism is justified by the liberal rationalities of freedom, choice and responsibility. As Rose and Miller (1992:179) argue, political rationalities “are morally coloured, grounded upon knowledge, and made thinkable through language”. It is these characteristics which underpin the distinctions between different forms of liberalism, as discussed below.

The term *technology* refers to the bundle of strategies, techniques, procedures, mechanisms, and practices through which authorities seek to make government programmes operable (Foucault and Gordon, 1980; Dean, 1999). Thus, while rationalities are about knowing, constructing and signifying the objects, subjects and goals of government, technologies are about the mechanisms by which these goals are achieved. However, the relation between rationalities and technologies is not a simple application of the former by the latter; it constitutes complex interdependencies between the two. Technologies are complex assemblages with their own characteristics and dynamics. They are enrolled, mobilised and pragmatically adjusted to enable authorities to exercise political power even if they do not present a perfect fit. We argue that ‘community’ and ‘localism’ are just that. They are complex assemblages that constitute and are constitutive of a particular mentality of government, namely liberalism. In the following section we briefly discuss *liberalism* and its emergence in the eighteenth century in the west. We then focus on two specific forms of liberalism, which became the dominant modes of government in the twentieth century particularly in the UK and USA, while acknowledging its wider political heterogeneity. These are: post-war *welfarism* and post-1970s *neoliberalism*. We pay particular attention to the ways in which liberal mentalities of government conceive of the nature, obligations, and responsibilities of the subjects of government (i.e. the governed) and how such conceptions differ between welfarist and neoliberal modes of governments.

Liberalism

“We will be strong in defence of freedom. The Government believes that the British state has become too authoritarian, and that over the past decade it has abused and eroded fundamental human freedoms and historic civil liberties. We need to restore the rights of individuals in the face of encroaching state power, in keeping with Britain’s tradition of freedom and fairness” (HM Government, 2010a: 11)

Liberalism fractures into multiple interpretations as soon as one begins to examine it. One major fault line in political philosophy is the concept of *liberty* itself. While the principle is sacrosanct to all liberals, there is much variation in how liberty is understood in relation to society and market, and what is seen as the legitimate exercise of power by political authorities. Central to the latter are the perennial questions of how much government is enough government, and how should the complex relationship between freedom and domination be managed. Or, in the language of contemporary debate what is the ‘right’ balance between ‘big society’ and ‘big government’ as depicted in Figure 5.1. However, as mentioned earlier, from the governmentality perspective, the real questions are not about *how much* government but *what type* of government, *for what* ends (rationality) and *by what* means (technology). In the last three centuries or so, different forms of liberalism have offered different responses to the above questions in different ways. Based on these it is possible to distinguish between: classical liberalism of the 18th and 19th century, welfarism of the early 20th century, and the post-1970 neoliberalism, as outlined below.

<Insert figure 5.1 here>

Classical liberalism

For *classical* liberals, liberty and private property were intimately connected and even considered as the same thing to the extent that free markets were seen as “the embodiment of freedom” (Robinson, 1961:104). For them, liberty was not simply defined by the freedom to obtain private property; it was also seen as best protected by it. In the words of Friedrich Hayek (1978:149) “There can be [...] no freedom of movement if the means of transport are a government monopoly”. For classical liberals, social (individual freedom) and economic (market freedom) liberalism went hand in hand and only a minimal “nightwatchman state” [as John Stuart Mill (1963) put it] whose primary task was to protect individual liberties could be considered as legitimate. The rise of liberal political philosophy in the 18th century was based on the normative critique of excessive and authoritarian government. A new way

of governing emerged whose objective was not simply to maintain the power of absolute rulers over their territories and sovereign subjects, but to govern the *civil society* which was construed as a ‘non-political’ and ‘private’ realm and endowed with freedoms and rights. To govern was no longer simply about making juridical subjects obey laws issued by ‘the king’ and imposed directly on them. It was also about shaping the conduct of the subjects by acting upon “the possible fields of their action” (Foucault, 1982:221), their network of relations, and the environment within which they operate (Rose *et al.*, 2009; Dean, 1999; Lemke, 2000). The focus was less on players and more on the rules of the game. New technologies, which were not limited to mechanisms of direct control and coercion, were invented to shape, steer and modify the imagined private sphere of civil society towards desired directions. This change of technologies should not be seen as the exercise of coercion and control from the back door, but rather as new ways of governing civil society “without destroying its existence and its autonomy” (Rose and Miller, 1992:180). This required embedding the state within an ensemble of rules, institutions and procedures, and connecting it to other forces that shaped the networks of civil society relations.

To govern, in liberal mentalities, was to align the aspirations of the individuals, communities and institutions with those of government in such a way that their self-fulfilments coincide with the fulfilment of government goals. Government in this sense is “a contact point” where governing of the self is integrated in the structures of coercion.

“Governing people in the broad meaning of the word [...] is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself” (Foucault, 1993: 204).

Central to the operation of ‘the contact point’ is how freedom is understood. Liberalism considers freedom not as the opposite of coercion or the site of struggle for utopian emancipation and resistance to authorities but, as an instrument or as Hayek (1976:163 original emphasis) put it “*an artefact*” that can be utilized for governing. Technologies of the self are considered as complementing rather than contradicting technologies of domination. Instead of being mere obedient subjects governed from the top, people fulfil the ends of government by freely and responsibly fulfilling themselves. Far from being an ethical critique

of social control, liberal governmentality considers “the very ethic of freedom itself” as “part of a particular formula for governing free societies” (Rose *et al.*, 2009: 12). We are ethically *obliged to be free* (not to be dependent) and to conduct ourselves freely yet in a responsible way (Foucault, 1982). *Responsibilisation*, therefore, is at the heart of liberal way of governing the self. It is used to steer individual freedom towards desired outcomes and governmental goals. In the liberal mentality, freedom brings about choice and choice brings about responsibility and obligation regardless of the structural constraints which are imposed upon the actors. We will elaborate on the naïvete of this perspective in section 4. Here it suffices to note that, to speak of responsibilisation as a technology is not to speak of it as a neutral process. On the contrary, it is politically charged and entangled with moral questions of: *responsible to whom and for what*. As will be shown below, what differentiates welfare liberalism from neoliberalism is based largely on how they respond to these normative questions.

Welfarism

The first half of the 20th century saw the rise of a ‘revisionist’ approach to liberalism. This in contrast to classical liberalism did not see an intimate or necessary connection between liberty and private property-based market (Paul *et al.*, 2007). Central to this revisionist approach were the emerging ideas in the German Schools of Frieberg and Frankfurt whose *Ordo-liberals*ⁱⁱⁱ were promoting the creation of a “social market economy” (Lemke, 2010: 192). They considered no juxtaposition between the state and the market and instead argued that “one mutually presumes the existence of the other” (Lemke, 2010:193). Economy was defined as “a social field of regulated practices” and an object of government which is constituted and maintained through socio-political interventions, rather than being a separate, autonomous domain with its own internal logics (Lemke, 2010:194 drawing on Foucault’s Lecture 20 February 1979).

As suggested by Gaus and Courtland (2010) these revisionist ideas were based on a number of powerful criticisms. Firstly, the ability of free markets to maintain a “prosperous equilibrium” (Beveridge 1944:96) with full employment was being questioned notably by John Maynard Keynes. Drawing the attentions to the experience of the 1930s Great Depression, he challenged the neo-classical economics’ assumptions, and argued that private markets could become stuck in equilibrium with high level of unemployment. Secondly, the diminishing faith in markets as the guarantor of all freedoms was coupled with a growing

faith in the legitimacy of the state to supervise economic life. Keynes advocated the need for government intervention to moderate the boom and bust cycles of economy and the use of fiscal and monetary measures to mitigate the adverse effects of recessions. This change of heart towards the role of government was reinforced by the democratisation of the western states whose elected members were seen as representing the population. Thirdly, it became clear that far “from being the guardian of every other rights”, property rights generate inequitable power relations and an uneven realisation of liberty (Ely, 1992:26). Concerns about equity were heightened by the development of liberal theories of social justice through the work of John Rawls (1971) and other advocates of egalitarian liberalism.

The revisionist ideas underpinned the rationalities of a new mode of government in many western societies after the 2nd World War; one which we know as the welfare state (or the ‘New Deal’ in the USA). Welfarism considered a set of appropriate goals for the government which included: the pursuit of national economic growth and its re-distribution across the national territory and social groups as well as the management of social risks across individuals’ life cycle. To these ends, responsibilities were shared by the growing bureaucratic apparatus of the state and citizens (civil society). In the UK, this rationality was reflected in the social contract that was formulated in William Beveridge’s 1942 Report. His pledge of war on five “giant evils” of squalor, ignorance, want, idleness and disease underpinned the Labour Government’s welfare programme. On the one hand, the state was made responsible for providing: full employment through Keynesian demand management, free health care through nationalised health service, life-long free education, and lifetime social security through a system of social insurance and pensions. On the other hand, citizens had to play their part by becoming “thrifty, industrious, and socially responsible” (Rose and Miller, 1992: 192). In line with the liberal understanding of freedom and choice, welfarism conceived of the subjects of government as *responsible* citizens. However, in contrast to neoliberalism it ensured that citizens’ responsibility was directed primarily towards *the society*, which itself, as will be discussed in section 4, was a construct of welfarism (Burchell, 1993).

Citizens were seen as free and autonomous individuals yet firmly “bound into a system of solidarity and mutual inter-dependency” (Rose and Miller, 1992:196) through various governmental technologies. Key amongst these technologies was the social insurance system. Although it was motivated by moral and political aspirations, it had the paradoxical effect of

de-politicisation: decisions became dominated by technical calculations of risk and security by technical and expert professionals whose concentration in the states' institutions endowed them a growing influence (Rose and Miller, 1992:196; Davoudi, 2014). Beneficiaries of social security were (and still are) given new 'identities' or as Maffesoli (1991) puts it, were 'identified' with certain categories of risks such as, unemployed, job-seeker, school leaver, carer, homeless, and disadvantaged. Thus, despite their egalitarian motivations, these technocratic processes of identification created social stigmatisation (Fraser, 2000).

Neoliberalism

The post-war welfare states and their social contracts became subject of much criticism particularly in the second half of the 20th century. Marxist analysts and communitarians criticised it for its paternalistic mechanisms of social control, hierarchical structures, undifferentiated responses to individual needs, over-confidence in experts and professionals, and command and control planning under whose weight civil society was fading away (Davoudi and Madanipour, 2013). These criticisms paralleled and, inadvertently, echoed neoliberal critique of welfarism, which was gathering pace and strength particularly through the work of a few Viennese economists and their Mont Pelerin Society^{iv} (MPS). The Society, founded by Hayek in 1942, along with its think-tanks off springs^v combined the classical liberal's moral critique of big government with the economic critique of Keynesianism to embark on a sustained criticism of welfare states for their ineffective fiscal interventions and their *dirigiste*, excessive and centralised power (Stedman Jones, 2012).

Karl Popper, a philosopher, played a major part in the critique of Hegelian and Marxist theory and its collectivist (as opposed to individualistic) understanding of society. Ludwig von Mises, an economist, attacked the growing bureaucracy and its lack of ability to restrain itself. It is interesting to note that the Coalition Government used a similar argument in defence of his localism agenda claiming that, "There's the efficiency argument - that in huge hierarchies, money gets spent on bureaucracy instead of the frontline" (HM Government, 2010b:4). Friedrich Hayek pointed to the impossibility of central planning on the ground that no one is capable of knowing what people want no matter how clever they are and how much expertise is available to them. Another related wave of criticism came from Milton Friedman, an economist in Chicago School. Like classical liberals, he "saw economic liberty as the safeguard of all other freedoms; and a swelling state as the road to tyranny" (*The Economist*, 2012:93). Although he considered himself as the heir to Adam Smith, a founder of classical

liberalism, unlike him Friedman argued in favour of a greater role for the private sector and competition in the provision of public services such as schools, infrastructures, utilities and health (Stedman Jones, 2012) and, hence, advocated for privatisation to become the core strategy of neoliberal governments. The rise of neoliberal governmentality was premised on and fed by these ideas.

As a mode of government, neoliberal political mentality differs from welfarism at several levels: “moralities, explanations and vocabularies” (Rose and Miller, 1992: 198). One key difference is its understanding of the relationship between *society and the state*. The centrality of this relationship in defining the form of liberalism is reflected in the UK Coalition Agreement, which attempts “to completely recast the relationship between people and the state” (HM Government, 2010a:8). Whereas welfarist liberals consider the state as the necessary regulator and keeper of the social order- albeit for the sake of the market economy-, neoliberals consider the big government not only inefficient and ineffective in regulating the economy, but also morally dangerous for the society. They argue that the state institutions are: firstly, self-serving because vote-seeking political parties tend to make lavish promises that can only be met with large amounts of borrowing; and secondly, immoral because the provision of welfare by the state cultivates ‘a culture of dependency’ which is morally damaging to individual freedom (Rose & Miller, 1992: 198). They suggest that the alternative to the state is the market, private insurance and self-reliance. The emphasis on self-reliance brings about a different morality of responsabilisation because it plays down the welfarist ideals of a reciprocal relationship between the individuals and the society, as will be elaborated in section 4.

In neoliberal mentality, what was previously seen as the ‘political’ responsibilities of government is reconfigured as commodities to be supplied by private providers and exchanged in the free markets. This leads to the second difference between welfarism and neoliberalism, namely their understanding of the relationship between *society and economy*. Whereas the former advocates “the idea of governing society in the name of the economy”, the latter redefines society as a form of economic domain (Lemke, 2010:197) and conducive to market principles of competition, supply and demand equilibrium, and enterprise. These principles have increasingly become “a kind of permanent economic tribunal” (Foucault’s Lecture 21 March 1979 quoted in Lemke, 2010:198) or a court of appeal before which the performance of all other activities by individuals, society and even the state are calculated,

measured and assessed. The social is increasingly colonised by the economic criteria of efficiency, competition and productivity, and measured by cost-benefit analyses. These criteria have come to define rules of the game and shape the conduct of all conducts. The reconfiguration of the political into techno-economic moves beyond the classical liberalism's view of economic liberty and extends the scope of free markets from being the *safeguard* of all freedoms to being *the organiser and regulator* of the state and society. In neoliberal mentality it is the market that governs the state and society and not the vice versa.

The emergence of 'neoliberal states' in the 1970s was rooted in these rationalities and their scepticism of the capacity and legitimacy of any forms of political authority to govern for the best. They used the social and economic storms of the 1970s as the evidence of the failure of welfarism. Two heads of the states became widely known as champions of neoliberalism: Margaret Thatcher, Britain's Conservative Prime Minister (1979-1990), and Ronald Reagan, the US Republican President (1981-1989). Despite the considerable contextual and historical differences in which they were operating, both drew on neoliberal ideas to embark on major restructuring of government and put in place a series of policies and programmes aimed at privatisation and creation of markets for areas which were previously seen as belonging to the 'political' domain of government. The list is far too long and familiar to justify its reiteration here but one point is worth stressing. Contrary to its rhetoric and its critique, the 'rolling back' of the state interventions was not so much about less intervention as it was about *different* forms of intervention. It is true that both administrations radically changed the size, shape and role of the state but, they simultaneously created other, indirect forms of intervention.

The outcome was, therefore, not less government but a *different* form of government; one which foregrounded "governing at a distance". The term, inspired by Latour's 'action at a distance' and coined by Miller and Rose (1990) means complementing and sometimes replacing *direct* regulations of formal institutions of the state with *indirect* mechanisms of control, located in multiple centres of calculations that are spatially and organisationally separate and distant from the subjects of government. Dean (1999) refers to these indirect mechanisms as *technologies of agency* (such as contracting out, out-sourcing, empowering, mobilising) and *technologies of performance* (such as auditing, monitoring, setting standards and indicators). If technologies of agency are "deployed from below", technologies of performance are "utilized from above" (Dean, 1999: 167). The former obliges us to be free

yet self-responsible while the latter seeks to align the outcome of our free choices with governmental goals of enhancing competition and enterprise. Such an alignment is sought through a complex assemblage of technologies that make our choices and actions calculable, comparable, controllable indirectly (and if necessary directly) and governable from a distance. Neoliberal technologies focus less on players and more on the rules of the game. By changing the parameters of the environment in which people operate, they seek to shape their conduct. As Dean (1999: 171) suggests, under neoliberalism “the national state takes on less a directive and distributive role, and more a coordinative, arbitrary and preventive one”. So, “the retraction of the welfare state may lead to less *state* intervention and provisions, but it does not necessarily lead to less *government* and discipline in Foucault’s sense of the word” (Davoudi and Madanipour, 2013: 559). In fact, the possibility of governing increases through government at a distance because it provides a better fit between the neoliberal mentalities and neoliberal technologies of government to which we now turn our attention.

The ‘post-social’ government: community and localism

“There is no such thing as a society” (Thatcher, 1987:10)

The above infamous remark by Mrs Thatcher has come to epitomise the neoliberal individualist views of the world. She subsequently clarified her remark by suggesting that, “my meaning... was that society was not an abstraction, separate from men and women who composed it, but a living structure of individuals, families, neighbours and voluntary associations” (Thatcher, 1993:626). The clarification brought her even closer to the liberalist view of society as simply a sum of individuals. This kind of seeing “human beings *in* society” (Mill, 1963:879 emphasis added) is rooted in classical liberalism of philosophers such as Herbert Spencer (1995 [1851]:1) who claimed that “the property of the mass are dependent upon the attributes of its component parts”. Mrs Thatcher’s remark was in keeping with the resurgence of classical liberal principles in the second half of the 20th century (mentioned above) and the growing criticism of the collectivist views of society. Increasingly, the supremacy of individuals as autonomous, free, self-interested and economically rational beings was being centre-staged and the focus of government. However, what rarely features in this narrative is that there is no such thing as ‘pure choice’ and that, individual’s choices and responsibilities are shaped and sometimes determined by factors beyond their control or even consciousness.

The re-emphasis on individuals should not be seen as ‘the end of the social’ (Baudrillard, 1983). On the contrary, it is misleading “to speak of ‘the death of social’” (Rose, 1996:330) because far from being unified, the social has always been a hybrid zone of multiple affiliations related to race, religion, culture, space and place. Deleuze (1979:xi) refers to the social as ‘a sector’ which groups together a diverse set of problems, institutions and interventions. Instead, the emphasis on individualism indicated the fading away of the construction of ‘the social’ as an essential, eternal and organic entity. For decades, a particular perception of the social prevailed which imagined society as the primary articulation of collective life and the welfare state as the *social* government. As Rose and Miller (1992:192) suggest, “the key innovation of welfarism lays in the attempts to link the fiscal, calculative and bureaucratic capacities of the apparatus of the state to the government of social life”. The social was imagined as the dominant articulation of collectivity and its cohesion was seen as a pre-requisite for a well-functioning ‘national’ economy. It was this particular construction of the social which began to lose its appeal and relevance in the 1970s when neoliberal mentality began to take hold. New rationalities and technologies emerged which sought “to govern without governing society” (Rose, 1996:328).

One reason was the perceived irrelevance of the ‘national’ in the globalising economy and the diminishing ability of national authorities in controlling borderless and footloose capital. A nationally cohesive society was no longer seen as necessary in the pursuit of economic competitiveness. A de-nationalised economy did not need a nationalised society in order to sustain its growth. Competition was encouraged not just between the nations, but also between localities (regions and cities) and *within* the national space. Another reason was that ‘the social’, as the primary target of government, was being criticised from across the political spectrum by those who contingently coalesced around concerns over the homogenising, universalising, alienating and disempowering tendencies of social forms of government (Rose, 1996). The result was the colonisation of politics by “an unguarded faith in the individual and free market as deliverer of freedom” (Stedman Jones, 2012:19). This was reflected in the opposition to a range of perceived collectivism including the Fabian socialism and the One Nation group in Britain, and the New Deal and Great Society in the USA (op cit.).

The supremacy of free individuals in political debate was coupled with a shift in the moral underpinning of responsibilisation in terms of responsible to whom and for what. Firstly, whilst the post-war welfarism considered individuals as citizens made responsible towards their society and reciprocally be looked after by social provisions, the post-1970s' neoliberalism see them responsible to and crucially *for* themselves first, and only then and, in a strict moral order, responsible for their families, neighbours and associations. Mrs Thatcher (1987:10) said it all, "...people must look to themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves, and then to look after our neighbour". Secondly, the post-war welfarism considered citizens to be responsible for economic growth and its equitable distribution. Neoliberalism considers the self-reliant individuals to be responsible *for* economic growth and enterprise. Responsibilisation as a government strategy had remained but its targeted beneficiaries and its purpose have been radically transformed. Furthermore, while the welfare state assumed the role of maintaining social orders through technologies of regulations and mediation, neoliberalism considers such a role as almost redundant and best left to another regulating entity; the market. Hayek's (1949) theory of 'spontaneous order' advocates that, social order emerges from the interaction of self-serving individuals and not as a result of deliberate planning by the state; that individuals, seen as rational-economic beings, gradually use the price systems to adjust their plans with each other and create a spontaneous social order, making the role of the state as the keeper and guarantor of social order almost redundant.

Community as a 'new social'

In coming to office in 1997, the Labour government softened the hard edges of neoliberal dismissal of the social as a mere heap of individuals by reconstructing a 'new social'; one which was not imagined as a totalising, organic whole, but as a sum of associations of free and responsible individuals. The Labour Party's longstanding *associational* traditions of unionism, cooperatives, mutuals and friendly societies provided the discursive field for the construction of a new collectivity in political imagination; one that was not made from the top down but built from the bottom up. The language of associations made the reconfiguration of 'the social' politically palatable and helped masking the perceived a-moral language of free market and its dogged, atomised individualism. The term which captured and somewhat eternalised the idea of associational society was 'the community'. In 1996 Tony Blair declared that, "the search is on to reinvent community for a modern age, true to core values of fairness, co-operation and responsibility" (Blair, 1996). Since then, there has

been an avalanche of legislation, policies and programmes whose titles begin or end with the term ‘community’. Indeed, it became “a key unit in the repackaging of the economy and society associated with the Third Way” and a means of segregating and localizing the socio-economic problems (Amin, 2005:614).

Today, ‘the community’ has become a hegemonic signifier of imagined collectivity and the terrain through which a growing number of societal concerns are problematised and acted upon. Unlike the social which was construed as a single collective being, communities are imagined as infinitely diverse, heterogeneous and overlapping with multiple allegiances which do not necessarily map on national territory, economy or society. Communities have come to represent the post-social collective life. As such they are perceived as the locus of unique and shared sets of: values and moralities (e.g. religion, gender), commitments (e.g. to environment, places), life styles (e.g. vegetarianism, dress codes), fears and concerns (e.g. crime) and / or nostalgia (e.g. diaspora) (Rose, 1996: 333). David Cameron appears to have remained faithful to this associational view of society. So, rather than questioning the idea of the society and reshaping the state in the name of the market, as Mrs Thatcher did, he has made ‘the Big Society’ his “passion” (Cameron, 2010) and aims to reshape the state in the name of civil society. His understanding of the society appears to follow the New Labour’s *democratic* individualism rather than Mrs Thatcher’s *liberal* individualism. Norberto Bobbio (1990:43) describes the difference between the two:

“Liberal individualism amputates the individual from the organic body ... plunges him into the unknown and perilous world of the struggle for survival”; “democratic individualism joins the individual together once more with others like himself, so that society can be built up again from their union, no longer as an organic whole but as an association of free individuals”.

Thus, the government of the ‘Big Society’ is not a *social* government; it is a government of splintered communities.

Localism as a ‘new national’

There is much continuity between the emergence of ‘the community’ and the birth of localism at least in the UK. Both represent post-social technologies of government with localism rendering ‘the community’ a spatial characteristic. As the community is imagined

and articulated as ‘the natural’ embodiment of collective life, so is the locale imagined and articulated as ‘the natural’ spatial scale within and through which collective life is experienced, enacted and performed. This is clearly reflected in the statement by the UK Secretary of the State for Communities and Local Government who justified the abolition of the regional tier of government by referring to ‘the region’ as an “arbitrary” political geography based on “unnatural blocks” (Pickles & Cable, 2010: no pagination). By contrast, the local is portrayed as the ‘natural block’ in which place-based allegiances are valued beyond and above the calculations of self-interests, and where communities are “best placed to find the best solutions to local needs” (HM Government, 2010b: 2).

As discussed above, the widespread support for governing through ‘the community’ was made possible because of the critiques of ‘the social’ from across the political spectrum. The same can be said about the political attraction of ‘the local’, because this too based on the critique of ‘the global’ by a range of political dispositions including those in “leftist academia and activism” (Purcell, 2006: 1924). The local has long been romanticised and essentialised as a force for ‘the good’. It is romanticised on the basis of “a Tocquevillean vision of locally based collective action and a belief in neighbourhoods as real and potential units of such action (Chaskin and Ambunimah, 1999:60 in Purcell 2000). The local is also essentialised as *a priori* democratic scale (Purcell, 2000) and the site of civic empowerment and resistance to the global capitalism, colonialism and state-centrism (Mohan and Stokke, 2000).

Defending localism, David Cameron also equates decentralisation with democratisation and argues that, “...there is the fairness argument- that centralised national blueprints don’t allow for local solutions to major social problems.” And, there is the political argument - that centralisation creates a distance in our democracy between the government and the governed”. (HM Government, 2010b:4). It appears that, ‘we are all localist now’ (Walker, 2002) and risk falling in what has come to be known as the ‘localist trap’ (Mohan and Stokke, 2000) where the local, as a well-defined geographic unit, is equated with ‘the good’ (Purcell, 2006) and a natural scale for doing ‘good’. Built into the localist trap is a Euclidean and hierarchically nested (like a Russian doll) conceptualisation of scale. Not recognising the fluid and relational quality of scale (Healey, 2007; Davoudi and Strange, 2009; Davoudi, 2012a) and its construction through social and political struggle (Marston, 2000) underpins the localist trap and its assumption that the local is more democratic than other scales. On the contrary, the politics of the local is neither unified nor confined to a perceived locality; they

are inseparably and relationally intertwined in a web of political and social actions within and beyond the localities.

The governmentality perspective avoids the localist trap and considers localism not as the antidote of globalisation and centralisation or the site of empowerment and resistance, but as “a different way of governing...” (David Cameron, 2011, no pagination). It is governing *through* localities. It offers a new site through which government is enacted. This does not mean the death of ‘the national’. Rather, it means the emergence of a particular construction of ‘the national’, one which is imagined as an archipelago of diverse localities that are home to a bundle of communities who make up ‘the social’. Localism has been mobilised as a government strategy for creating new ways of mapping and defining the conduct of individuals and communities. Through a complex process of identification and subjectivity the local becomes both the subject of government and the technologies through which the subjectivity of individuals could be re-constituted. They become the site where new links are forged between governing others and governing the self, with latter being extended from the individuals to communities within their imagined ‘natural’ scale. It is a post-social technology used to inscribe the liberal rationality in the practice of governing. That is why we concur with Clarke and Cochrane (2013) that localism should not be measured against an ideal notion of decentralisation and self-government. Instead, the governmentality perspective raises a different set of questions related not to *how much* freedom and choice, but *what type* and to what ends. It focuses on the nature (not extent) and purpose of responsabilisation, raising questions such as: to whom is the local responsible and for what?

Freedom and responsibility

Localism extends the liberal conceptions of freedom, choice and responsibility which are associated with individuals and communities to localities. Its language is peppered with the liberal advocacy of responsibility and self-reliance. Consider David Cameron’s statement below,

“What is my mission? It is actually social recovery ... to mend the broken society. that’s what the Big Society is all about... *responsibility* is the absolute key, giving people more control to improve their lives and their communities, so people can actually do more and take more power [...] But above all, it’s *entrepreneurship* that is going to make this agenda work” (Cameron, 2011, no pagination, emphasis added).

In the welfarist liberalism of the first half of the 20th century, the social was invoked as a collective responsibility, spatialised across the national territory (Rose, 2996). Individuals were held responsible for their conducts in and towards the society but, the society and its ‘external’ structuring forces were taken into account in the consequences of their (mis)conducts. The emergence of the community has shifted the responsabilisation from being directed to the society as a whole, towards the self-selected, imagined communities to which the responsible individuals are seen to belong. The social determinants of individual conducts are largely replaced by the specific moral codes of their specific communities. The focus on the communities appears to have fragmented, pluralised and cosmopolitanised the field of morality. As Rose (1996:334) suggests, “the subjects are addressed as moral individuals” and “atomised actors” whose conducts are determined by their own morality and that of their imagined and real communities. The influence of social structures is increasingly played down. Individuals in communities are expected to be self-reliant and masters of their own destiny.

As does the discourse of the community retrieve the individual conducts from the social order and locate them into moral pluralism of communities, so does the discourse of localism retrieve them from ‘the national’ order and place them in the pluralism of localities. Individuals’ ethical responsibilities towards the ‘national’ interest are played down, while their responsibilities towards their own localities are played up. Localities, as the new imagined collectivity, are expected to be responsible for their own conduct and their own fates. Localities are responsabilised *to* and *for* themselves. In some ways, this can be seen as the heightening of a trend which began a few decades ago, albeit not always in the name of localism. One example is the shift in regional policy of the 1960s and 1970s away from regional redistribution of resources to ‘regions for themselves’. Indeed, post-1970s’ governments in the UK, and several other western countries, have long been localists, in the sense that ‘the national’ has increasingly resisted to be held responsible for the fate of ‘the local’. Tackling the divide between the rich south and the poor north in England, for example, has ceased to be cast in the language of and policies for regional distribution, social solidarity or ‘territorial cohesion’. Rather, it is about making the north stands on its own feet and act as an autonomous, self-reliant, and responsible locale. The emphasis has shifted from public investment in places that are most *in need of* growth to those that show the greatest *potential* for growth. Thus, while it is accepted that an infrastructure investment of £2600 per

head in London compared with only £5 per person in the north east “is not fair”, the neoliberal mentality does not consider fairness as “the right measure by which to judge an urban policy” because, “Scarce resources should go where they will generate the greatest returns” (*The Economist*, 2013:15). This is reflected in the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review which cut the local governments’ budget by an average of 4.4% but, some of the most deprived local authorities received cuts of 8.9% while some of the most affluent ones received cuts of only 1% or less (Clarke and Cochrane, 2013).

Thus, although localism is portrayed as an emancipatory process of self-government, in practice it is conditional and calculative and works by utilizing the self-governing potentials of ‘the local’ to align their goals to neoliberal values of free market, enterprise and self-reliance. The locals are freed to “become entrepreneurs of themselves” (Rose et al, 2009:11) yet within the framework of ‘the national’ governmental priorities such as deficit reductions, competitiveness and growth. As Cruickshank (1999:60) argues the “will to empower may be well intentioned, but it is a strategy for constituting and regulating the political subjectivities of the empowered. Whether inspired by the promise of self-government and autonomy...empowerment is itself a power relationship”.

Resilience and self-reliance

Neoliberal responsabilisation involves offloading of responsibility from the formal institutions of the state to individuals, communities and localities in the name of self-reliance and resilience. Although the latter is an ecological concept, promoted by Buzz Holling and his fellow ecologists in Resilience Alliance, it has now colonised multiple arenas of public policy (Davoudi, 2012b). The speed by which resilience is taking hold in public discourses and government agenda is largely due to its intuitive ideological fit with neoliberal mentality. In short, evolutionary resilience suggests that all social and ecological system dynamics can be seen as non-linear iteration of an adaptive cycle (Gunderson & Holling, 2002). It is, therefore, advocated not only as a property of ecosystems, but also as a general systems theory that integrates society, economy and ecology. At the heart of resilience thinking lies the principle that systems are non-linear, complex and *self-organising*; that they are endowed with forms of ‘capital’ (ref) defined as “the inherent potential of a system that is available for change, since that potential determines the range of future options possible” (Holling, 2001:393).

The principle of self-organisation also defined Hayek's theory of spontaneous order (mentioned above) and his call for a reform of "all social institutions in accordance with the self-organising dynamic of the market" (Walker and Cooper, 2011:150). He was working on his theory at the same time as Holling was working on his pioneering paper on resilience (Holling, 1973). Like Holling, Hayek also drew on complexity and non-equilibristic systems theories to embark on a sustained criticism of the state-engineered equilibria of Keynesian demand management. He argued that, "social systems are like biological systems newly defined by scientists as complex, adaptive and non-linear" (Hayek, 1974, no pagination).

When resilience is used in the social context, the principle of self-organisation is translated into self-reliance, implying that individuals, communities and localities should "pull themselves up by their bootstraps and reinvent themselves in the face of external challenges" (Swanstrom, 2008:10). It is this ideological fit that has tuned resilience and self-reliance into government's key mantra. Self-reliance justifies the retreat of public support and social security from vulnerable individuals and localities in the name of resilience, as shown in the following statement from a government-funded report on community resilience: "if the Government takes greater responsibility for risks in the community, it may feel under pressure to take increasingly more responsibility, thereby eroding community resilience" (RRAC, 2009:6). The neoliberal insistence on free and self-reliant individuals and localities comes close to social Darwinism and the survival of the fittest (Davoudi, 2012b). It resonates with the Darwinian law of natural selection with resilience being the measure of the ability of people and places to survive in a turbulent world.

Furthermore, self-organisation and spontaneous order carry anti-political motifs (Shedler, 1997; Rose, 2006; Clarke and Cochrane 2013) in the sense that they replace political authority with other forms of maintaining social order and coordinating collective affairs. As mentioned in section 2, neoliberals' preferred alternative to political authority is the self-regulating dynamics of the market. Governing through the local de-politicises politics in a number of ways: firstly, by foregrounding the role of the market in maintaining social orders; secondly, by privileging the role of technocrats and experts in policy decisions; and thirdly, by replacing communicative rationality with instrumental rationalities. Clarke and Cochrane (2013:16) distinguish between the anti-politics of the New Labour and that of the Coalition Government, arguing that the former "recognised the pre-conditions for politics" but "replaced the content of politics ... with expertise and technology"; while the latter, "denies

even the preconditions for politics. It imagines a nation of autonomous and internally homogenous localities. Then it replaces the content of politics ... with two things: markets... and technologies of direct democracy such as referenda”.

We would argue that the distinction is not so pronounced. If acknowledging pluralism is the differentiating criteria, as they suggest, then the New Labour’s elevation of ‘the community’ is as much a denial of the pre-conditions for politics as is the Coalition’s elevation of localism. If the local is perceived as uniform and homogenous by the latter, so was the community by the former. Both used various technologies of government to depoliticise and techno-economise politics. Both represented communities and localities as sites in which “the apparent opposites of enterprise and community, of efficiency and welfare, of economic means and local ends” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002:341-342) could be reconciled. The rise of evidence-based policy in the 1990s is a profound example of the pursuit of anti-political technology (Davoudi, 2006). Although performance targets are largely replaced with market incentives as a way of regulating and governing from a distance, the goal has remained intact: “to construct prudent subjects whose moral quality is based on the fact that they rationally assess the costs and benefits of a certain act as opposed to other alternative acts” (Lemke: 2010: 201) and hence bear the consequences of their action. Both have used neoliberal indirect technologies of government which tend to control, regulate and steer the conduct of communities and localities without being held responsible for their actions and fates (ibid.).

Conclusion

“We should not assume that all is for the worst in this ‘post-social’ age” (Rose, 1996: 353).

There is a degree of truth in this statement and many commentators in this volume have shown the progressive potentials of localism. Indeed, if there is one lesson to be learned from resilience thinking is that uncertainty and complexity open windows of opportunity and possibilities for alternative actions. Localism may well be such a window through which new spaces of contestation and new ways of breaking away from undesirable ‘normal’ (Davoudi, 2012b) may emerge. Whether there is sufficient appetite for ceasing such transformative opportunities depends to a large extent on societal preferences which, in England, appear to be shifting towards neoliberal values. The 2012 British Social Attitudes Survey, for example, showed a move to the right. During the early 1990s’ recession less than a third of Britons

thought unemployment benefits discouraged work, this figure rose to two-thirds in 2011 (*The Economist*, 2012:36). The trend is stronger among the young who appear to becoming “classical liberals: as well as prizing social freedom, they believe in low taxes, limited welfare and personal responsibility” (*The Economist*, 2013:29). The Ipsos MORI Poll indicates that “every successive generation is less collectivist than the last” (ibid) and while “all age groups are becoming more socially and economically liberal, the young are ahead of the general trend”. Another Poll- YouGov- confirms that “those aged 18-24 are more likely to consider social problems the responsibility of individuals rather than government” (ibid). The right-wing think tanks are of course celebrating and consider the high level of “libertarianism” among the politically active young as the “visible tip of an iceberg of passive libertarian sentiment among the disengaged” and a sign of “the emergence of a mass libertarian movement” (*The Economist*, 2013:30 quoting the Institute of Economic Affairs). This maybe an overstatement but is a sign of the hardening of the views on collective values and social welfare which in turn may reinforce the popular foundation of neoliberal governmentality.

However, people’s attitudes change and future is still full of alternative possibilities! Furthermore, there are always tensions in the technologies of government. As Miller and Rose (1990:23) suggest, although governmentality is characteristically optimistic, “government is a congenitally failing operation”. Soon after its construction, cracks appear in the architecture of its technologies and render them unsuitable to the ideal mentalities of government. With regard to localism, one such crack is already surfacing. It stems from the assumption that liberated localities will behave responsibly and align their unified self-interests to that of government goals. Neighbourhood planning, the localism’ flagship policy, is a good example of such fallible assumption as it is yet to deliver the expected quantities of housing development irrespective of the introduction of financial incentives. Localities resist behaving homogenously with one single aspiration and the “politics of place beyond place” (Massey, 2005) is proving more influential than is imagined. The tension between the perceived moral and responsible individuals, communities and localities, and their identification as rational economic actors, whose decisions are solely motivated by the cost-benefit analysis of their self-interests, remains high; and finding ways of bridging the two remains a critical challenge for neoliberal governmentality.

Other cracks may appear from a sustained normative criticism of neoliberalism. One is based on the inherent social Darwinism of self-organisation and the constructed identity of individuals as self-reliant, resilient and skilled entrepreneurs of themselves. Given that not everybody fits in this description and given the reduction of effective social security and public sector support, inequalities may well be exacerbated and in turn challenge the liberal ideals of justice and fairness. Another is based on the anti-political tendencies of localism which invade and colonise politics by technocratic and calculative practices. This may lead to political foreclosure which although might help achieving short term consensus, in the long term it may lead to social ruptures, challenging the liberal ideals of democracy and choice. Whether future technologies attempt to plaster over the cracks or reconstruct the entire architecture remains an open question.

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Notes

ⁱ Referring to David Cameron, the Conservative Prime Minister of Britain (2010 – 2015)

ⁱⁱ However, the arguments against the state-centred conception of political authority do not imply that government has no centre; instead they suggest that “centres of government are multiple” and depending on particular governmental rationalities, various locales are made to act as a centre (Rose and Miller, 1992:185). For example, under the neo-liberal rationality, communities and now localities are made to act as new centres of government.

ⁱⁱⁱ These were based in Frieberg School and called Ordo-liberals after their close association with and writing in the journal *Ordo* (Lemke, 2010)

^{iv} After the name of a village in Switzerland where its headquarter is located

^v Notably Institute of Economic Affairs founded by Fisher in 1955 in London