Abstract

This paper considers the political geography of localism and reviews the insights of geographers regarding localism and locality. It identifies three main approaches to locality in Human Geography. Regional geographers, humanistic geographers and spatial scientists view localities as relatively natural phenomena. Marxist and political-economic geographers view localities as social phenomena produced by uneven capitalist development. Post-structuralist geographers view localities as characteristically open, plural and dynamic. The paper also distinguishes three sets of political localism to be found in human-geographical literatures. Firstly, localism describes seemingly natural ways of life – organised to maximise authentic experiences of place in the case of Humanistic Geography, and to minimise the friction of distance in the case of spatial science. Secondly, localism describes cultural-political expressions of spatial divisions of labour, including local political cultures, local proactivity in the context of large-scale economic restructuring, and actually existing, variegated, local neoliberalisations. Thirdly, localism describes struggles to produce locally-scaled action, including projects of local autonomy and self-sufficiency directed against the central state, movements to defend collective consumption from developers, coalitions to defend fixed capital against devaluation, and state-downscaling to regulate capitalism. To illustrate their usefulness, some of these insights are applied to the localism agendas of recent British governments.

Key words

1. Introduction

Localism has recently been moved to the foreground of British politics by the United Kingdom's Conservative-led Coalition Government. The rationalities, programmes and technologies of this localism can be found in the 2011 Localism Act and in numerous other Parliamentary Acts, Bills, White Papers, Green Papers, and Statements, along with Ministerial speeches and press releases (Clarke and Cochrane 2013). Rationalities include the view that power has become too concentrated in Westminster and, for reasons of

efficiency, fairness, and democracy, needs dispersing to Local Authorities and a variety of other actors, presumed to be local: communities; civil society groups; public service professionals; small and medium-sized enterprises; and so on. The programmes and technologies of this localism appear to come in three main parts, involving various moves to: free local government from central and regional control; make local government more directly accountable to local people; and devolve power beyond local government to that variety of actors presumed to be local. A fourth complicating element is that local-government funding has been cut significantly (ibid).

In a speech to the Local Government Association Annual Conference of 2011, Eric Pickles, Conservative Member of Parliament and Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, had this to say of the Coalition Government's localism agenda: "This is a decisive, fundamental, and irreversible change in England's political geography, one of the world's most centralised states. We are taking power away from Whitehall and putting it back in the hands of councillors and councils" (Pickles 2011: no p.n.). The content of the latter sentence is especially arguable, given the cuts to local-government funding noted above. But, what seems less arguable is that localism has much to do with political geography.

As such, the main purpose of this paper is to consider the political geography of localism. More specifically, it reviews the insights of political geographers and human geographers more broadly on the topics of localism and locality – where such geographers are defined as scholars who self-identify as human geographers, who trained as human geographers, who are strongly associated with Human Geography by others, and/or who seek out human geographers as primary audiences for their research (e.g. by publishing in the journal *Political Geography*). More specifically still, much of the paper privileges British Human Geography, or at least Anglophone Human Geography. Indeed, this is one of Geography's most important insights: that views are always views from somewhere. A view of locality and localism from another country would no doubt be different; especially, for example, if that country had a strong middle-tier of government, such that central-local relations were less prominent as a research problem than has often been the case in the UK.

There have been moments in the development of Human Geography when locality has been something of a key concept for the discipline. One example is the locality debates of the 1980s and early 1990s, to be discussed in Section 3 below. But, often, for human geographers, locality has been eclipsed by other related concepts, including region and place. These concepts all have their own definitions. Regions are zones of the Earth's surface of

indeterminate size, characterised in the case of uniform or formal regions by one particular feature, e.g. mining or language, and characterised in the case of nodal or functional regions by association between diverse elements, as with urban regions (Henderson 2009a). Places are meaningful sites, varying in scale from the corner of a room to the globe (Cresswell 2009). Locality is the scale or range of experience, defined by the day-to-day activities of people in the ordinary business of their lives (Taylor 1989). It is also a unit of analysis, or level of political geography, in the series global-national-local (Taylor 2004). Yet, the definitions of each of these concepts also overlap. Place describes a region or locality that is constructed, sensed, experienced and regulated by humans (Henderson 2009b). Locality describes a place or region of subnational scale (Painter 2009).

In this paper, the starting definition of locality is Taylor's (1989, 2004): the range of ordinary activity, the scale of day-to-day experience and the political-administrative level below the national. As we proceed, we shall see many of the problems of such a definition. Nevertheless, Taylor's approach is useful because early editions of his landmark *Political Geography* (e.g. 1989)[1] are some of the few authoritative publications – textbooks, dictionaries, encyclopedias, handbooks etc. – where human geographers have explicitly considered the politics associated with localities, as opposed to the politics associated with cities (e.g. Painter and Jeffrey 2009), places (e.g. Flint and Taylor 2011) or regions (e.g. Gallaher et al 2009). Explanation for this refocusing away from localities and towards cities, places and regions is no doubt complex. Jones and Woods (2012) suggest it followed from: empirical evidence for a new regionalism during the 1990s, including evidence for post-Fordist industrial regions and a Europe of the Regions; and post-structuralist critiques of territory and scale (see Section 4 below). They also caution against throwing the baby out with the bathwater, arguing that localities continue to: get constructed by the deployment of state resources; be identified by their cores, if not by their fuzzy edges; and produce "locality effects".

What, then, does Taylor have to say about the politics associated with localities – which I am taking as the starting definition for localism (and, again, the complexities here should become clear as we proceed)? Drawing on research by Cox (1988; Cox and McCarthy 1982), discussed further in Sections 3 and 4 below, Taylor identifies two kinds of "politics of turf". "The class politics of location" is when local home-owners with children in local schools become politically active in, and about, their neighbourhoods. They seek to defend the use value of their neighbourhoods against those who would change them to increase their exchange value, and form social movements to defend social reproduction and

collective consumption against threats from attempts to advance economic production. By contrast, "the territorial politics of location" is when locally dependent households and capital mobilise together in growth coalitions to defend localities against disinvestment in a context where localities are open to and part of the world-economy.

Taylor also discusses two other forms of localism, in addition to these politics of turf. Political cultures can vary locally in relation to social contexts provided by local labour markets and the different mixes of social groups, patterns of social relations and experiences to which they give rise. Drawing on research by Parkin (1971) and Savage (1987), he notes how people get socialised into local political ideologies and practices. The other way in which localities and politics come together for Taylor – this time influenced by Cockburn (1977) and Duncan and Goodwin (1988), whose research we consider in Section 3 below – is via the local state. In a context of uneven development, for reasons of administrative efficiency and governmental legitimacy, almost all territorial states have institutions operating at the level of the locality. But, while the local state performs certain functions for the central state, it is not simply an agent of the central state and is sometimes used to oppose the central state. The result can be waves of decentralisation in the name of state efficiency and legitimacy, followed by waves of centralisation in the name of central control.

Many of these topics identified by Taylor receive further critical attention in the rest of this paper. They do so alongside many other topics, because human-geographical views of locality and localism have been numerous, varied and changing over time. In the next section, I show that, for much of the twentieth century – indeed, for much of Western history – human geographers approached localities as natural phenomena and were often associated or aligned with political localisms of the period. In Section 3, I show that, since the 1970s, Marxist and political-economic geographers have approached localities as social phenomena produced by uneven capitalist development, with political localism pursued by national and international elites, as state rescaling, and also by locally dependent groups, as defensive protection of local competitive advantage. Section 4 considers how, in the last couple of decades, post-structuralist geographers have further reconceptualised localities as open, plural, dynamic, globally produced and productive of the global. This view of localities has led them to approach political localism as a challenge centred on the negotiation of difference, both within and between localities. The concluding section returns to localism in recent British politics and reviews human-geographical perspectives on the localism agendas of New Labour and the Conservative-led Coalition. Both agendas are seen to have fallen short in meeting the various challenges of localism – though perspectives on the current

agenda were necessarily provisional at the time of writing. These agendas, in a context of broader processes of decentralisation, provide one explanation for current interest in locality and localism among British and other human geographers and related social scientists.

2. Natural localities: Regional Geography, Humanistic Geography, spatial science

Since the earliest forms of geographical enquiry, scholars have sought to identify and describe localities, places and regions. For example, Classical Geography distinguished between cosmology, or the science of space, chorography, or the description of large 'spaces-in-the-making' such as countries, and topography, or the description of small 'already-made-spaces' such as localities (Livingstone 1992, Cresswell 2009). After the Renaissance and Enlightenment, European geographers began to analyse and seek explanations for local and regional differences, often resorting to environmental determinism (Tomaney 2009). They also began to provide more exact descriptions of localities and regions – their natural resources and populations in particular – to aid with nation-state building (ibid).

By the turn of the Twentieth Century, most geographical enquiry focused on localities and regions, viewing them as products of specific environmental contexts and productive of specific local or regional cultures. Indeed, areal synthesis and differentiation was thought to be what united Physical and Human Geography, and to distinguish a united Geography from other disciplines in the emerging academic division of labour (Livingstone 1992). In the 1970s and early 1980s, this so-called Regional Geography inspired a Humanistic Geography (Cresswell 2004). Localities were approached as products of essential human desires for authentic places (Relph 1976) and lives centred on stable homes (Buttimer 1980). Prior to this, overly ideographic and descriptive Regional Geography had already provoked a nomothetic, explanatory, quantitative turn in post-war Geography. The resulting spatial science drew on economic theory and social physics to approach localities as products of spatial laws (Johnston 1997).

So, for much of the Twentieth Century, many geographers viewed localities as effectively natural phenomena derived from environmental differentiation across the Earth's surface, universal human desires and needs for homes and meaningful places, and the friction of distance on human interaction. Furthermore, these views of localities as effectively natural phenomena both drew from, and fed into, political localisms of the period. In France, the regional monographs of Paul Vidal de la Blache and others were closely associated with a conservative localism seeking to protect family, church and commune from the centralised state, on the one hand, and radical individualism, on the other (Livingstone 1992). In the

USA, the studies of Carl Sauer and others sought to recover particular cultural landscapes before they disappeared under a perceived flood of environmental destruction and cultural homogenisation originating in the European exchange economies (ibid). By contrast to these associations between ideographic and chorological Geography, on the one hand, and conservative political localism, on the other, the anarchist Geography of Pyotr Kropotkin and Élisée Reclus, emphasising the (potential) autonomy and self-sufficiency of localities, was popular among radicals during and after the Spanish civil war (Tomaney 2009). Geographies of localities, then, could lend themselves to both conservative and radical political localisms. But, it was not until the rise of Marxist Geography in the 1970s that localism itself became an explicit focus of critical geographical enquiry.

3. Produced localities: Marxist and Political-Economic Geography

In contrast to regional geographers, humanistic geographers, and spatial scientists – for whom localities represented more or less natural phenomena – since the 1970s, Marxist and political-economic geographers have approached localities as historical products of uneven capitalist development. For Smith (1982, 1984), uneven development follows from the tendency in capitalism towards differentiation in levels of development, which, in turn, follows from three processes: first, the progressive division of labour; second, the progressive division of capital; and, third, the progressive concentration and centralisation of capital in the hands of individual capitalists as they compete by expanding operations and seeking out economies of scale and agglomeration economies.

Two points are worth adding to this account of uneven development. Periodic crises of accumulation lead to capital-switching between places (Harvey 1982). In certain places, profit-rates fall over time, as ground-rents increase, unions form, and wage-rates increase (Smith 1984). At these moments, capital finds new spatial fixes in previously devalued locations (Harvey 1982, Smith 1984). This means that localities are not produced and then fixed in perpetuity, but get made, unmade and remade over time. Secondly, new spatial fixes bring new spatial divisions of labour that get laid over previous rounds of investment and the distinctive landscapes of class and political relations they produced, resulting in local economic performance that cannot simply be read off from Marxist theory and predicted (Massey 1984). This notion of overdetermined localities – of localities produced by multiple current and historical determinations – influenced many 'locality studies' of the 1980s and early 1990s (see Cooke 2009). Here, the focus was on how localities respond in varied ways to industrial restructuring, drawing on the resulting labour-market and other characteristics

from previous rounds of spatial fixing. Significantly, for this paper, the focus was on local entrepreneurialism in the face of capitalist spatial development: localism as local proactivity.

While locality students were often rather hopeful about the potential for proactive localism to ameliorate the effects of wider political-economic processes, many Marxist and post-Marxist geographers remained sceptical, if not cynical, regarding the origins and capacity of political localism. Some identified a 'new localism' of the late Twentieth Century in North America, Western Europe and elsewhere, which they sought to understand and explain using regulation and state theory. Fordist-Keynesian regulation (re)produced the national state during the post-war decades. It was at this scale that conflicts were negotiated and compromises settled – not least because the labour movement was stronger at this level than on the shop floor (Swyngedouw 1997). But, Fordism entered a period of crisis during the 1960s and 70s. Profitability fell, resulting in downward pressure on wages, unemployment, deindustrialisation and fiscal stress (Swyngedouw 1989). Interconnected responses to this crisis included the deregulation of markets, innovations in telecommunications, flexible production processes, foreign direct investment strategies and devolution of regulation from the national scale to the local scale in such fields as capital/labour bargaining, redistribution and redevelopment policy (ibid). A new localism emerged comprised of local bargaining agreements, local welfare responsibilities and competitive urban entrepreneurialism. More broadly, a 'glocal' pattern emerged of global regulation, local regulation and a hollowed-out nation-state (Swyngedouw 1997).

Localities, in this literature, are viewed as state spaces, territorialised and rescaled for capital (Brenner 2004; Brenner et al 2003). Studies in the early and mid-1990s used regulation theory to interpret local government reform in the UK. Local government was viewed as part of the post-war mode of regulation (e.g. Painter 1991). It supported mass production, through land-use planning and infrastructure provision. It supported mass consumption, through its roles in housing, education, public transport, social services and collective wage bargaining. Then, during the crisis period from 1973 onwards, local government was viewed as one site of struggle over and development of new structural forms (ibid). Having been an agent of regulation, local government became an object of regulation (Goodwin and Painter 1996). There was pressure to reduce local-government spending. Public services were privatised. Commitments to regional balance and growth were no longer made. A 'new localism' emerged pitting localities against one another (Brenner and Theodore 2002a). Urban entrepreneurialism (Harvey 1989a) replaced spatial Keynesianism – the post-war project of national territorial equalisation and sociospatial redistribution (Martin

and Sunley 1997). City-regions were provided with place-specific forms of administration designed to attract mobile investment capital and involving new responsibilities for economic development (Brenner 2004).

If one localism found in this kind of Geography describes competition between entrepreneurial localities situated in a wider deregulated economy, then a second localism found here refers to the way in which neoliberalism is contextually embedded, path dependent, and produced within local contexts defined by the legacies of inherited policy regimes, institutional frameworks and political struggles (Brenner and Theodore 2002b). Neoliberalism always translates into actually existing, variegated neoliberalisation (Brenner et al 2010). Neoliberalism-in-general always translates into local neoliberalisations (Peck 2004).

Despite this acknowledgement of local variation, however, regulation approaches in Geography have been criticised for their top-down imagination of power and lack of attention to how localism emerges from local politics as well as state-spatial strategies (Clarke 2009). Indeed, this was a key teaching of early Marxist geography. For Harvey (1982), capitalists invest in fixed capital and must then defend such investments – and their locations – against devaluation, once technological change elsewhere raises the average rate of profit. In such endeavours, land and property owners are joined by developers and builders, the local state, and possibly labour (if conditions of labour are relatively good locally such that labour has plenty to lose from devaluation). As we saw in Section 1, this defensive, competitive localism constitutes one of Cox's (1988) "politics of turf". Whereas "the class politics of location" involves local homeowners with children in local schools defending the use value of their neighbourhoods against those who would change those neighbourhoods to increase their exchange value (Cox and McCarthy 1982), "the territorial politics of location" involves locally dependent households and capital mobilising together in growth coalitions to defend localities against disinvestment and broader processes of uneven development (Cox 1988). Cox's view is that, during the 1980s, this latter politics of turf superseded the former. Competition between localities for investment superseded competition within localities, between, say, capital and labour (ibid). A "new urban politics", founded on shared local dependence, organised through business coalitions and public-private partnerships, secured by ideologies of civic loyalty and local patriotism, superseded the urban social movements of the city of collective consumption.

This view of localism as the politics of location, derived from a focus on local politics under capitalism, represents one corrective to regulationist depictions of localism (Cox 2002).

Another corrective is research on the local state – with 'corrective' used here in the conceptual sense and not the chronological sense (because regulation approaches actually post-date research on local politics and the local state). For Cockburn (1977), local government is part of the capitalist state – an instrument of class domination used to manage social and economic reproduction in the interests of capital – and should be seen as the local state: the means by which people are managed in detail at the local scale. For Duncan and Goodwin (1988), the local state is the means by which uneven development is managed through locally variable policies. However, as a product of compromises reached in the late-Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century, the local state also works to accommodate the demands of the working class (ibid). As elected, representative, and legitimate, the local state is both agent and obstacle for the national state (Miliband 1969). Central policy gets administered in local areas. But, local interests and views also inform local policy. This happens especially in places with strong local groups derived from work experiences under the spatial division of labour, e.g. Red Clydeside (Duncan et al 1988). It can result in conflict between central and local government, which, in turn, can result in attempts to restrict local-government autonomy.

Here, we have a different account of local-government reform in the UK during the 1980s. Central government agendas provoked local socialism, which, in turn, provoked national control of local government finance, new central government institutions at the local level, abolition of those Local Authorities perceived to be the most troublesome and removal of policy-making to an appointed regional tier of government (Duncan and Goodwin 1988). We also have numerous versions of localism. Management of people at the local scale is a form of localism. Local policy derived from local interests and views is a form of localism. Strong local groups derived from work experiences under the spatial division of labour is a form of localism. And the variable implementation of public policy is a form of localism.

This last version of localism became the focus of numerous studies on local responses to national policies during the 1990s (e.g. Pinch 1995). Such projects were reminiscent of earlier locality studies, both in their research designs and in their hopefulness regarding local proactivity. But, Marxist and political-economic geographers more generally have tended to view political localism as something of a distraction from other forms of politics. For Harvey (1989b), localism is part of a postmodern reaction to the crisis of time and space provoked by recent crises of overaccumulation and associated rounds of time-space compression. Instead of turning inwards towards "aesthetics and Being", he recommends turning outwards towards "ethics and Becoming" – the continuing modernist project. Such a project, for Peck and

Tickell (1995), would look beyond local resistance, to national and supranational agendas, and beyond the zero-sum game of interlocal competition, to political engagement at the national and international scales, where "the rules of the game" are set. The idea here is that, just as the spaces of the circulation of capital have been upscaled in recent decades, so the politics of resistance must not retreat to particularism and identity politics (Swyngedouw 1997). Difference, diversity, and local knowledge clearly have value, but life in localities depends not only on local people, who often fail to agree, but also on broader economic and political structures (Mohan and Stokke 2000).

4. Deconstructed localities: Post-structuralist Geography

In the last two decades, geographers have wrestled further with questions of difference and diversity within, and between, localities, and with how localities relate in complex ways to the wider political economy. They have done so, in many cases, by taking and developing a post-structuralist approach to Geography. If post-structuralism in Literary Studies places emphasis less on systems of signs, codes in texts, underlying truths and deep, formal, determining structures, and more on impressionistic assessments, multiple readings, alternative interpretations, and excesses of meaning, then post-structuralism in Geography places emphasis less on spatial laws and determining economic forces, and more on multiple experiences of space and place, the subversion and appropriation of spaces and places and the continual production of space through interaction (Murdoch 2006).

This relational view of space – where space is continually produced through interaction – represents a development of Marxist and political-economic approaches to space, rather than some clean break or radically new direction. So, the 'post' in post-structuralism can be taken to mean not simply 'after', but also 'informed by' or 'following from'. Doreen Massey is probably the geographer most associated with relational space. Her research on 'the regional problem' during the late 1970s and early 1980s defined regions as effects of relations between multiple actors (Cochrane 2013). Her research on globalisation and place during the late 1980s and early 1990s defined places as effects of global flows and connections (Massey 1991). Her concept of power-geometry makes clear how the fortunes of localities are explained, not only by internal factors, whether environmental or cultural, but also – and sometimes primarily – by histories of trade, migration, and invasion (Saldanha 2013).

The scale debates of the 1990s and early 2000s represent a particularly strong link between structuralist and post-structuralist approaches to the local. Most participants were

united against a common enemy: cartographic, Euclidean, Cartesian, Westphalian scale (Ward 2010). Most participants argued that scale is a product of struggle and compromise between social actors (Herod and Wright 2002). From this generally shared position, structuralists then emphasised the role of territorial divisions of labour and the projects of capitalists, political institutions and organised labour in the production of scale (Herod and Wright 2002, McMaster and Sheppard 2004). Post-structuralists, by contrast, emphasised the roles of discourse and the struggles and strategies of multiple actors in the production of scale (Leitner 2004, McMaster and Sheppard 2004). They also noted how scale – when not only a mental device, but also a material assemblage – becomes just a rare effect of network extension processes that result in multiple, overlapping actor-networks of similar length (Latham 2002, Leitner et al 2002).

We are now in a position to consider post-structuralist views of locality and localism. Localities have come to be seen as: open, porous, permeable, heterogeneous, incoherent, dynamic and incomplete; products of mixture, encounter, intermingling; characterised by juxtapositions and co-presences; sites of distanciated connections; marked by other times and places; and implicated in numerous networks (Amin and Thrift 2002). As such, the local-global binary has come to be rejected (Gibson-Graham 2002). The local is not the global's subordinate opposite. It is not a small and powerless field of play to be penetrated by global forces. Rather, the local is global, just as the global is local.

Massey (1991, 2005, 2007), in her series of writings on "a global sense of place", expresses these ideas as clearly as anyone. Walking down London's Kilburn High Road in the early 1990s, she finds herself rejecting a number of ideas, that: places have single identities; local identity is founded in ancient history; places are static; and places have boundaries. Instead, she argues that local particularity comes from how a place is positioned as a point of intersection or meeting ground for a specific set of networks of social relations – which then interact with local social relations and the accumulated history of place to produce local particularity (Massey 1991). More than two decades later, analysing London's formal politics, Massey (2007) finds herself supplementing this idea of "the world in the city" with a related idea of "the city in the world". A global sense of place has two sides. The world comes to London, demanding hospitality and making London into a diverse meeting place. But, lines also run out from London – from trade routes and investments to political and cultural influences. Just as the local is globally produced, so the global is locally produced.

Massey (2005) demonstrates that localities are: products of interactions and interrelations; sites of multiplicity, coeval trajectories, co-existing heterogeneity,

contemporaneous plurality; bundles of different social stories with different temporalities and spatial reaches; never finished, always in the process of being made; events or moments in power-geometries. If this is the case, then what are the implications for localism? It has been tempting for some post-structuralist geographers to see everything as process and, thus, to deny the existence of things, including localities. But, Massey (2013) rejects this position, noting how many processes move so slowly and take so long that people must live and deal with 'things' as they wait for them to pass. Put differently, categories and boundaries always change eventually, including those of localities, but, while they exist for a time, responsibility must be taken for them (ibid). Localism, in this view, becomes a necessary challenge (or set of challenges).

One such challenge is the negotiation of difference within localities. The spatial is where otherwise unconnected narratives come into contact (Massey 2005). One figure of the spatial – including and especially the local – is the accidental neighbour (ibid). And this surprise of the spatial, this "throwntogetherness" of place, this implication of one life in the life of another, demands a response. At the very least, it results in the social. In moments of antagonism, it results in the political and the question of how different people might live together (ibid). So, different voices must be accommodated. Ultimately, political choices must be made.

Of course, this challenge of negotiating difference within localities also applies to policy actors. The shift from local government to local governance around the turn of the Twenty-First Century in the UK and elsewhere problematised 'the local' in local governance and opened it up to national regulations and standards, the decisions of central government ministers, the sub-local agendas of self-governing schools or neighbourhood associations, the global strategies of corporations, and so on (Goodwin and Painter 1996). Governance of localities and regions came to involve a loose and negotiated set of political arrangements, bringing together elements of central, regional and local institutions, along with private- and third-sector agencies (Allen and Cochrane 2007). These institutional assemblages achieve consensus, if at all, by the intermediation, brokerage and translation activities of consultants (ibid).

Another challenge of localism is the negotiation of difference between localities. Recall from Massey (2005) that localities are not simply products or victims of the global, but also agents in, and through, which globalisation and other localities get produced. So, there is potentially some purchase through local politics on wider global mechanisms; there is potentially some local responsibility for other places (ibid). This applies especially in the

case of a city like London (Massey 2007). Should Londoners take all the decisions pertaining to London, as happens with territorially based democracy, when the effects of such decisions – from pollution to brain-drain – exceed the geography of London? Or, at this moment of interdependence, do we need a more outward looking politics of place, a local politics with sights beyond the local; "a politics *of* place *beyond* place" (ibid)?

5. Conclusion: Locality and localism in recent British politics

A variety of localisms have been discussed in the preceding sections, which can be sorted into at least three categories. First, there are the seemingly natural ways of life studied by humanistic and spatial-scientific geographers. Here, localism describes social life organised to maximise insider, and thus authentic, experiences of place, or to minimise the friction of distance and associated inefficiencies. Second, there are the cultural-political expressions of spatial divisions of labour and other factors, of concern to political-economic geographers. Here, localism describes local political cultures, comprised of local ideologies and political practices, or local proactivity, in the context of large-scale economic restructuring, or actually existing, variegated, local neoliberalisations. Third, there are the political struggles to produce locally-scaled action for some reason or other. Here, localism describes: conservative commune-building against the centralised state and radical individualism; anarchist-influenced projects of local autonomy and self-sufficiency; social-movement building to defend collective consumption from developers; growth-coalition building to defend fixed capital from devaluation; state-downscaling to regulate capitalism; negotiation of difference within localities, in order that neighbours might live together; and negotiation of difference between localities, in search of responsible action in a context of interdependence.

Given these many perspectives on localism – and the current high position of localism on the political agenda in the UK (as demonstrated at the top of this paper) – the rest of this section reviews the contributions of human geographers to understandings of localism in recent British politics. The localisms of the current Conservative-led Coalition Government and the previous three New-Labour Governments exhibit a number of clear differences. For example, rational and responsible local action for New Labour was conceived as innovative and entrepreneurial action meeting minimum national standards, to be encouraged by good practice guidance and enforced by targets, audit and inspection (Clarke and Cochrane 2013). By contrast, rational and responsible local action for the Coalition is conceived as innovative and entrepreneurial action meeting local needs, for the most part, and meeting national minimum standards only in a few exceptional policy areas where encouragement is by

economic incentive (ibid).[2] Despite these clear differences, however, both localisms have been critiqued by human geographers along at least three similar lines.

Firstly, both localisms have been shown to be complex political projects. There was never any consensus about what localism meant for New Labour (Morgan 2007). In Blair's neoliberal version, it meant devolution beyond the state to individual consumers and accountability through market-based mechanisms. In Brown's social-democratic version, it meant devolution to lower territorial levels within the state, devolution to citizens organised as communities of public-service users, and accountability through the ballot box (ibid). Moreover, in practice, while New Labour devolved power to the Celtic nations and London, it only really talked about devolving power to city-regions, Local Authorities and neighbourhood-based communities. Problems may have sometimes been viewed as complex, to be solved by locally contingent solutions, born of local experience and creativity, but this "pragmatic localism" was overshadowed by New Labour's centralising tendencies (Coaffee and Headlam 2008). Official terms to describe the resulting political fix were 'constrained discretion' and 'earned autonomy' – where power was devolved to Local Authorities, only once they had met centrally-determined goals and standards. Terms used by geographers have included "decentralisation within limits" and "constrained localism" (ibid).

Something similar can be said for the localism of the Coalition Government. As we saw in Section 2, localism is a vague category with associations ranging from conservativism to anarchism. As such, localism was something around which both coalition partners were able to come together (Clarke and Cochrane 2013). Localism makes room for geographical understandings about scale and place, alongside political understandings about decentralisation, participation and community, alongside managerialist understandings about efficiency and forms of market-delivery. It suggests any combination of the following items: local government; local democracy; community; decentralisation; governance; privatisation; and civil society (ibid). In addition, decentralisation quickly became a problem for the Coalition. The slow pace of devolution beyond local government led to plans for Proportions (of public services that must be delivered by civil society organisations). The reluctance of Local Authorities to freeze Council Tax led to plans for capping in cases of "excessive increase". Clarke and Cochrane (2013) interpret such conflicted localism – reminiscent, at least in some respects, of New Labour's constrained localism – as spatial liberalism: where possible, the enabling of rational and responsible local action through decentralisation; where appropriate, the encouraging of such action through liberal technologies of government (e.g. economic incentives); and where necessary, the enforcing of such actions by illiberal means

(e.g. Proportions or Council Tax capping). Theories of the local state, reviewed in Section 3, also help to make sense of conflicted localism. Democratic Local Authorities both serve and confront the central state. Power gets devolved to them during crises of legitimacy or efficiency. However, a wave of centralisation often follows this wave of decentralisation – just as soon as Local Authorities are deemed to be confronting the central state too much.

Secondly, both localisms have been shown to have failed, or to be failing, the challenge of the world in the city; the challenge of negotiating difference within localities. New Labour sought to govern through community participation. But, in practice, this community governance led to exclusion of "inappropriate" and "irresponsible" community members with "irrelevant" concerns and knowledge, and the glossing over of community tensions, divisions and conflicts (Raco 2000). New Labour failed to understand that communities are no longer straightforwardly territorially based (if they ever were). Given this – and the power relations within all places (Featherstone et al 2012) – local people do not come together easily around a shared vision (Cochrane 2004).

This critique has also been made of the Coalition's localism. Much like the Regional and Humanistic Geographies reviewed in Section 2, it imagines natural localities in which needs can be agreed (Clarke and Cochrane 2013). It fails to recognise the translocal geography of many lives, which continually move across local borders – whether physically, virtually or imaginatively. It fails to recognise the radical plurality of many localities, where people meet with different genders and sexualities, from different social classes and ethnic backgrounds, often to disagree about local needs. Clarke and Cochrane (2013) have called this localism "anti-political". It denies the preconditions of politics: social plurality; and the need for collective decisions among different interest groups. In addition, it replaces the content of politics – canvassing of majority but also minority opinions, listening and discussing, conciliating and compromising – with two things: markets, through which localities are thought to get the services they deserve; and referenda, through which often slender majorities might control local taxation levels or local development planning.

Regarding the challenge of the world in the city, both localisms have actually brought more of the world into the city. New Labour built on previous reforms of the 1980s and early 1990s, opening up local governance to private-sector actors, third-sector actors, locally-based national programmes, decentralised national agencies, and so on (Cochrane 2004). Coalition reforms point towards a complex institutional landscape comprised of: weakened Local Authorities; strengthened civil society organisations, often with links to larger charities and faith organisations; strengthened private sector firms, often with links to national and

transnational parent companies, groups and investors; and partnerships at scales beyond the Local-Authority area, as with Local Economic Partnerships, or within those areas, as with Local Enterprise Zones (Clarke and Cochrane 2013). All this makes the challenge of negotiating difference within localities greater still. It also leads some geographers to interpret the Coalition's localism as just the latest mutation of neoliberalism; another instance of roll-back neoliberalisation in response to the present crisis (Featherstone et al 2012). Public spending is being cut and civil society is being promoted, but only within a variety of capitalism that frees no time for volunteering, leaving the way paved for additional privatisation (North 2011). In this view, the Coalition's localism becomes a regulatory project constructing new state spaces for capital, as discussed in Section 3.

A final critique of both localisms addresses their failure to meet the challenge of the city in the world; the challenge of negotiating difference between localities. New Labour sought to boost the competitive potential of disadvantaged localities (Amin 2005). In doing so, it imagined the local as cause and consequence of, and remedy for, social and spatial inequality (ibid). So, there was a turn to community and a spatialisation of national policy, evident in such programmes as the New Deal for Communities and the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. The assumption was that cohesive communities could be produced using mixed neighbourhoods and new forms of participation; and, once produced, these confident communities would lead to regeneration. But, this assumption exhibited a problem of spatial ontology (ibid). Society cannot be reduced to local communities. Localities are increasingly linked. Deprived areas are produced through connection – through external control, dependent development, growth in more prosperous regions, outflows of resources and skills etc. – more than community-building (ibid). As we saw in Sections 3 and 4, regions and localities are produced through multiple relations.

Similar observations have been made about the Coalition's localism. It is seen to ignore how outcomes for local people are shaped by power relations between places (Featherstone et al 2012, North 2011). It is seen to ignore how a "progressive localism" might build on existing multiculturalism to generate place-based political activities that look outwards and seek to address inequalities between places and to feed into broader political movements (Featherstone et al 2012).

Progressive localisms can still be found in the current period, however, suggesting that localism itself is not a problem. This would be spatial fetishism (Massey 2005). However, there are no spatial rules; just more or less responsible spatialisations (ibid). Massey (2013) is optimistic about localism in Venezuela at the moment, where state

resources have been invested to ensure popular grassroots participation, and where people learn about politics as they participate, fail to agree and negotiate collective decisions. Back in the UK, Wills (2013) is optimistic about London Citizens: a coalition of civil society organisations bringing together trade-unionists, educationalists, people of faith and others, working to forge shared interests among Londoners and keen to take advantage of new opportunities opened-up – whether intentionally or not – by the Coalition's localism agenda.

Notes

1. My own edition, the Second Edition published in 1989, has a chapter on "Political geography of localities". By the most recent edition, the Sixth Edition published in 2011, this had been replaced by two chapters: "Cities as localities", where the focus is more on cities than localities; and "Place and identity politics".

2. These exceptional policy areas include local taxation, local economic development, access to education and housing, and weekly bin-collections. Associated economic incentives include the compensation fund for Local Authorities freezing Council Tax, the New Homes Bonus, the Community Infrastructure Levy, the Pupil Premium and the compensation fund for Local Authorities restoring weekly bin-collections. (For more on all this, see Clarke and Cochrane 2013).

Acknowledgements

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