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Author(s): Mary Corcoran

Source: *Justice, Power and Resistance* Volume 1, Number 2 (December 2017) pp. 283-299

Published by EG Press Limited on behalf of the European Group for the Study of Deviancy and Social Control electronically 16 May 2018

URL: <http://www.egpress.org/Mary-Corcoran-Resilient-Hearts>

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Resilient Hearts: Making Affective Citizens for Neoliberal Times

Mary Corcoran¹

Abstract

Civil society is regaining critical relevance after decades of attempts to suborn non-governmental organisations and more recent governmental manoeuvres in Western democracies to control activists and social advocates (Civicus, 2016). In this article, I suggest that contemporary struggles to keep the public terrain open for critical participatory politics must be seen against past neoliberal strategies for defining the salient concepts and functions of 'good' citizenship in terms of personal altruism or charitable philanthropy. In Britain, as well as in other countries, tropes of 'community' have offered a convenient template for facilitating neoliberal political agendas which privilege ideas about the essentially individualistic nature of volunteering and citizen participation. For decades, the project for creating a 'post-welfare' social contract has placed great emphasis on engineering participatory cultures among the citizenry in order to bolster their resilience in the face of deregulated, globalised capitalism. This article traces some of the key trends in British neoliberal communitarianism from its ordoliberal roots to the contemporary wave of participatory culture which appeals to productive citizenship, especially among the retired, unemployed and the young.

Introduction

In many European countries and beyond, and from national to neighbourhood levels, civil society is prosyletised as a source of cohesion, legitimacy and justice (van Houdt and Schinkel, 2013; Putnam, 2000). Direct participation by citizens and volunteer groups in activities such as mentoring or crime prevention adheres with a quest for sociality, place and identity as answers to economic crises and late-modern insecurities (Young, 2007). Yet, the belief that bringing citizens together in mutual recognition rests on the conceit that social solidarity has remained intact in an age of widening inequality. In this ideological world,

¹ Mary Corcoran (PhD) is Senior Lecturer in criminology at Keele University. She writes on prisons, women in the criminal justice system, civil society and voluntary sector actors in criminal justice, and life after release from prison. Email: M.Corcoran@keele.ac.uk

the operative concept of 'community' masks the awkward fact that competition for social goods including: policing, security and access to decent living standards, has accelerated under late capitalism to the detriment of social cohesion (Dorling, 2011).

The neoliberal version of public spirited citizenship is vested in claims that private and personalised interests are the fundamental driving forces of common good. Indeed, many neoliberal proponents of community activism assert that one tier of social organisation, 'civil society' can only be promoted if another tier of collective organisation, the welfare-providing state, is diminished (Norman, 2010). It is entirely consistent with right wing thinking that such political projects should magnify constructs of a 'grand' or 'big' society while also celebrating the idea of a 'small state' (Powell, 2007: 7-30). Indeed, from neoliberal and free market perspectives, the objectives of building community, locality and identity are to emancipate citizens from the burdensome state. As such, the 'Big Society' or 'Shared Society' introduced by British Conservatives, can be understood as an ideological project for depoliticising 'community' as a solidaristic concept and reconstructing the social terrain in terms of 'collaborative individualism' which is found in traditional social institutions like churches or temples, family and neighbourhoods (Cameron, 2010).

This article considers how concepts of 'community' offer a symbolically rich terrain for governments to advance the formation of entrepreneurial and self-reliant citizens in the context of neoliberal reforms to the labour market and welfare provision. It tries to demonstrate that in promoting greater levels of communitarian or voluntaristic activism among its citizens, British governments have privileged ideal-typical dispositions of 'good citizenship' which are consistent with the kinds of neoliberal subjectivity that is better adapted to market societies (Bonefeld, 2011). Far from being self-contradictory projects, the pursuit of communitarian goals *and* the promotion of competitive, self-responsibilising social identities have intertwined objectives. That is to say, while citizen activism might rally opposition to austerity or inequality, neoliberalism as a governing logic has constantly transformed and reworked to assimilate resistance (Harvey, 2005; Alexander, 2006, part IV). One key area of struggle is the entrenchment of elite financial and cultural interests in the public domain in a movement which Habermas (1992, 1994) described as the refeudalisation of the public sphere. This paper tries to link these developments. The first section examines the influence of Hayek, Friedman and neoliberal thinkers on reframing ideas about 'publicness' and the common good in terms of philanthropic altruism that were meant to displace redistributive welfare

models. These discourses appeared in agendas which promoted ‘good citizenship’ through a fusion of individualism, moral enterprise and responsabilisation. The second part reflects on the role of the state in channelling public services to private, non-state domains. This is examined through the attempted functional and political incorporation of the voluntary (charitable, or philanthropic) sector in alignment with state and corporate and philanthropic satellites (INCITE, 2007). Several commentators suggest that this sector is being pushed into a “shadow penal complex”, populated by charities, for-profit and public sector agencies (Corcoran, 2011; Schafer, 2012). Additionally, this section explores the symbolic meaning of the ‘Big Society’ policy in Britain after 2010 as an example of neoliberal communitarianism which crystallised stated goals of substituting state welfare with grassroots philanthropy. Thirdly, the paper traces these strategies back to German ordoliberalism, the philosophical movement which influenced neoliberal thinking about the need to engineer participatory cultures among the citizenry, in order to bolster their resilience in the face of deregulated, globalised capitalism. The final section considers the persistence of hegemonic neoliberal influences on the formation of a contemporary affective *politics of giving* which are directed especially at economically precarious groups.

Privatizing citizenship

In Britain, as well as in other countries, tropes of ‘community’ have offered a convenient template for facilitating neoliberal political agendas about the essentially private and individualistic nature of volunteering, citizenship or rights of participation.

That shift in thinking is evident in the manner in which the ‘public interest’ has been reframed to connote the private aspirations and consumerist claims to entitlements which may only be legitimately claimed by ‘taxpaying’ and law-abiding consumer-citizens. The links between citizenship and social responsibility were forged by securing an ideological consensus with strategic sections of the public to favour bracketing off welfarist notions of the common good from individual interests. From the 1980s and up to recently, much of the capitalist world was captured by a political credo whose tenets refuted the notion of society based on social democratic or redistributive justice principles as unsuitable to the conditions of late modernity. Some more fundamentalist versions of free market thinking, influenced by Friedrich Hayek and the Chicago School economists led by Milton Friedman, postulated that welfare states

threatened the place of individual and civil liberties as the primary units of 'society' (Hayek, 2009). Hence, state welfare systems were said to be contrary to the public interest because they took away from local communities the capacity to address social problems such as crime, poverty, environmental dilapidation and social deprivation. The argument ran that public welfare ought to be legitimately curtailed to fostering the capacity of individuals to a point where they can support themselves, but welfare should not become a permanent and universal feature, because such projects deprived citizens of the freedoms to determine their own choices (Hayek, 2009: 227). This was not to deny the place for "common effort" or the provision of "public amenities which may be in the interest of all members of the community" (ibid: 226). Rather, it was held that the 'coercive', centralised state welfare system needed to be dismantled in favour of local, temporary, minimalist social security systems.

This view of the incapacitating effects of state-based welfare was seized on by the New Right, and later by 'New' Labour Blairists, as an opportune pretext for implementing welfare minimalism through 'modernising' state administrative and service structures. Proponents of modernisation argued that the breakdown of welfare universalism was historically inevitable, ushering in the necessity for a new social contract where citizens would absorb greater levels of personal responsibility for their own security and welfare demands. In office, all governments from the 1980s to the present, attacked the public sector as monolithic bureaucracies that restricted citizen's choices (Le Grand, 2007), asserting that welfare states had curbed citizens' material aspirations and created a permanently helpless underclass, thus hastening the decline of Western economic advantage. The challenge was seen as no less than restructuring the national economy to be more amenable to global service markets, including security and criminal justice concerns, and to remould the social contract between government and self-reliant, enterprising and active citizens.

Mainstreaming the voluntary sector

Since the 19th century, state-civic relationships were forged by the crucial role that the voluntary sector played in the nation-building project, which consolidated in the middle- to late- 20th century, in conjunction with the social contract of the welfare state (Dacombe and Morrow, 2016). Civic ideology performed a key role here and was the binding glue which brought citizens – in the form of 'communities' and the voluntary sector - consciously into play in

constructing solidaristic imaginaries of nation. From the late 20th century to present, governments of the Left and Right in Great Britain elevated certain charitable entities as partners in the business of public welfare (Wolch, 1990). In Britain, successive governments saw the potential for civil society to offer a veneer of social cohesion in the face of the political reluctance on the part of the state to effect redistributive justice, and the failures of markets to spread wealth. This was manifest in the versions of neoliberal communitarianism espoused by theorists of political centrism and eagerly adopted by 'reforming' governments (Le Grand, 2007; Norman, 2010). There are some differences in the approaches of respective governing parties, of course. For example, the New Labour government (1997-2010) created a 'Compact of Agreement' which formalised the partnership between the 'organised' community and voluntary sector partnership with government (Corcoran, 2011) and brought the voluntary sector closer to statutory welfarist goals. 'Organised' means those sections of the voluntary or charitable sector that largely depend on providing contracted services to the state, and which make up a sub-stratum of state welfare and justice service providers. Despite being only one part of voluntary sector, those agencies that contract to provide public services are frequently conflated in political discourse with the voluntary sector as a whole. This both collapses distinctions between the institutionalised 'penal voluntary sector' and the more diverse and plural assemblage of voluntary associations, social movements and charities that comprise 'civil society' (Powell, 2007), and establishes a false parity between the state and a unified voluntary sector. Consistent with its 'Third Way' programme, New Labour promulgated a view of civil society as coexisting with the state's interests. However, New Labour's notion of community owed much more to the highly conservative communitarianism of Amitai Etzioni (1994), than to more radical visions of participatory democracy (Fraser, 1990). Here, the 'primary functions of the community were social control and the provision of services on an unpaid basis' (Levitas, 2012: 330). To varying degrees, successive governments continued to make room for the voluntary sector within formal government statutory service provision. From 2010-2015, the Coalition government continued with New Labour's strategy for partnership with the voluntary sector, but this relationship was increasingly directed towards preparing the voluntary sector to become a competitor alongside the private sector in a radically deregulated penal services market. Since 2015, the economic recession and subsequent programme of fiscal austerity has accelerated the scale and pace of deregulation and outsourcing to charitable and for-profit consortia to run prisons, prisoner

educational and employment programmes, housing, court duties, probation and resettlement services (Corcoran, 2014).

Corcoran et al, (2017) argue that the voluntary sector-state relationship is being influenced by different pull factors. Firstly, governments have explicitly mobilised the voluntary sector as a vehicle for installing market reforms in public services. Secondly, legislation created deregulated, competitive markets which outsourced police, probation, resettlement and prison-based public services to competing providers from the commercial, public and voluntary sectors. In practice, this supposedly 'neutral' competitive space privileges commercial modes and values while undermining public and civil society principles and approaches. Thirdly, the state has made space for voluntary sector organisations to participate in penal service markets under specific conditions (while delegating the 'responsibility' to them to play by the rules, or terminate the contract). Fourthly, the installation of market logics is also coordinated with disciplinary paradigms and mechanisms (such as audit regimes and targets) that are aimed at making the social economy conform to neo-liberal productive economies. Here, charitable contractors must publish their performance data, conform with payment-by-results regimes, or demonstrate monetisable 'outcomes' of their work with clients, for example. Finally, the creation of contract markets puts voluntary organisations into competitive relationships with former collaborators. As the environment in which the voluntary sector operates is now qualitatively defined by market ideologies, the contemporary pattern of assimilation is subtler and extenuated, but no less influential than simple political dominance. Nowadays, co-option is exercised via the 'hidden hand' of the state which, in leveraging aspects of market discipline, brings charitable and for-profit actors under greater fiscal, and ultimately political, influence of central government.

Charities and activists have vigorously contested the pull towards greater dependency on state or corporate patronage, of course, but even the most committed advocates of civil society as a site of resistance acknowledge the struggle against the tendency towards incorporation. Far from securing the voluntary sector's role in the mainstream of public policy, dire predictions that the sector faces a perfect storm prevail. Commentators refer to the precarity of charities as they are in "squeezed between" (McKay et al, 2011) the tectonic plates of austerity and greater competition with for-profit companies. Accordingly, charities increasingly view themselves as both *structurally* disadvantaged vis-à-vis states and markets, and *existentially* threatened by exposure to turbulence in policy and the economy. A commonly heard argument

from those charities that rely on public funding is that they cannot afford to stand still so that adaptation to more competitive service markets is inescapable and even desirable (Corcoran et al., 2017). Arguably, in the context of privatisation and the marketisation of the social (and penal) economy, it is difficult to avoid the dominance of neoliberal and free market logics in shaping relationships between the organised penal voluntary sector and the state.

Big Society and neoliberal ‘crisis’

The ‘Big Society’ project was launched during the general election campaign of 2010, in the UK by the then leader of the Conservative party, David Cameron (Conservative Party, 2010). It was a loose combination of ideas borrowed from free market theory and conservative communitarianism which proposed to withdraw the state from as many parts of social welfare networks as ‘society’ could take on. Talk of reviving a Big Society was sceptically received by the public for its apparent gimmickry and internal contradictions, and in fact it had a transient and unsettled existence in policy before quietly disappearing early into the Coalition’s term of office (2010-15). However, although much of the critique was well-founded, some of it missed the symbolic importance of the Big Society project as a continuation of a political narrative that sought to counter political failures that were exacerbated by the fallout of economic crisis post 2008. However, the superficial veneer of inclusiveness and equality underlined the irrelevance of politics to residents in deprived areas (Macmillan, 2011). Other critics fixed on the juxtaposition of society with its ‘rhetorical other’ – big government – assigning significance to their ‘zero-sum’ positioning which would gradually see the retreat of the state’s presence from more and more areas of society (Tam, 2011). As far as the Big Society agenda itself was concerned, the function of the state was to act as an enabler through a programme of decentralisation, local self-sufficiency and volunteerism, before stepping back to leave newly-empowered communities to take over (Office for Civil Society, 2010; Civil Exchange, 2012). Furthermore, several commentators found an unbridgeable disconnection between ‘the rather abstract but positive imagined future of individual and community responsibility set against a traditional ideological critique of (big) state failure’ (Macmillan, 2011: 5). During that same period, the social state was being decoupled from ‘society’ via a programme of unparalleled cuts to public spending and deep austerity (Levitas, 2012).

The political rhetoric of the Big Society was arguably always more important than its substance in that it crystallised the push back against the social state in

terms that were meant to appeal across the political spectrum. The language of ‘social responsibility’ resounded with familiar ideological tropes of self-help, social order, responsibility and qualified rights of citizenship with regards to legal protections and access to social resources. In this sense, this conception of a greater society was founded on appeals to centrist ‘organic’ values of resilience, independence and localism alongside free-market libertarianism. Cameron was self-consciously trying to signal a departure from the anti-social legacy of the ‘nasty party’ that had existed since Margaret Thatcher’s privileging of individualism over the collective good. Indeed, right-wing commentators claimed that that Thatcher’s concept of a society founded on rational self-interest was misunderstood, while defending her view in purely Hayekian terms:

[T]he words “there is no such thing a society” do not, as some claim, refer to a kind of selfish individualism in which fellow citizens and the collective good are ignored. Rather it refers to the empowerment and emancipation of the individual who, in the absence of an overpowering and stifling state, can achieve his/her potential when there is a genuine meritocracy and a level playing field (Hussain, 2013).

Yet the Thatcherite legacy persisted in Cameron’s endorsement of a “*radical revolt against the statist approach of Big Government that always knows best*”, as a precondition that ‘will change our nation by bringing people together to improve life for themselves, their families and their communities. The stifling clutch of state control will be *replaced by the transformative power of social responsibility*’ (Cameron, 2010, emphasis added).

The successor to the ‘Big Society’ was the more tenuous ‘Shared Society,’ first articulated by the Prime Minister, Theresa May, in January 2017, when she assumed office. The political rhetoric of ‘Shared Society,’ was repeated the day after her general election on June 9th, 2017 to prop up her fatally weakened governing party:

The government I lead will put fairness and opportunity at the heart of everything we do so that we will fulfil the promise of Brexit together, and over the next five years build a country in which non-one and no community is left behind’ (May, 2017).

Although intended to strike an appeasing mood with the electorate, these stated goals have since then been ‘directly contradicted by the policies of her government that use the tactics of blaming the poor, placing faith in trickle-down economics and entrenching inequality’ (Hardman, 2017). In many senses,

the toxic belligerence of the current Prime Minister's 'respectable' right-wing nationalism, combined with the vacuous sentimentality of her concept of society, summarises the hegemonic ideology that has developed over previous decades. At the time of writing, the politics and society of the United Kingdom are focused on crisis management as a consequence of the political paralysis brought about by the Brexit referendum (2016) and an opportunistic general election (2017) which returned a slim majority for the political Right, and a resurgent Labour Party.

Resilient hearts: making affective citizens

The idea that the state should assist in socialising its citizens to adapt to economic change is not new. What surprises is the experimentation in social engineering that appeared to contradict the usual libertarian insistence on societal self-determination and individual freedom of choice. This apparent incongruence seems less stark if one approaches the appeal to 'society' in terms of a project for creating the psycho-social conditions of neoliberal autonomy embodied in enterprising, responsible, self-reliant citizenries. Political history, for example, allows us to trace continuities between past and present grand society projects which channel the efforts of civic networks and communities into socialising citizens for living within capitalist economic demands. Werner Bonefeld (2011) has incisively demonstrated how much contemporary neoliberal communitarian thought owes to German ordoliberalism from the 1930s to the 1950s, formulated by figures such as Röpke and Rüstow and profoundly influential on Hayek and followers from the 1960s onwards. In its purest ideological form, ordoliberalism sets out a defence of free markets while taking care to anticipate the tendencies that lead to hedonistic individualism or the destruction of social bonds. But ordoliberals feared the unforeseen consequences of capitalist dynamism such as social alienation or the politicisation of workers who turn to political formations like trade unions or labour parties. Thus, the institutions of civil society were indispensable to 'shap[ing] the mental make-up of workers' (Bonefeld, 2011: 9) by cultivating resilience in the citizenry to withstand social and economic crises. It must be added that civil society in this scenario was composed of domesticated and traditional entities – churches, neighbourhoods, charitable associations. These were placed off limits to class politics and moreover, thought to counteract tendencies towards self-organised class- or identity-based movements. Additionally, unlike later proponents of laissez-faire capitalism, ordoliberals

favoured strong governments which would deploy the organs of the state to *'secure markets and to navigate crisis in the face of mass democratic challenge'* (Bonefeld, 2011: 13). In this vein, there was a role for a 'strong state' which could justifiably exercise powers that go beyond 'nudging' and 'steering' practices for the greater goal of 'making society "big" enough to cope with economic shock in an entirely reliable, courageous, enterprising and self-responsible manner' (ibid).

The construction of resilience as a national characteristic and the nostalgisation of community are not self-contradictory exercises, but they actualise a deracinated version of collective participation which is consistent with sustaining a vision of the market society. Certainly, neoliberals and organic conservatives (paternalistic, traditionalist, one-nation) understand community differently: neoliberals see clusters of rational actors while conservatives privilege hierarchies, tradition and continuity. But each places value on the potential of community to provide alternative models of social security by absorbing social need and economic risk while acting as weak shields against market forces. In this sense, the current enthusiasm for fostering social resilience is consistent with disciplining populations to the conditions of individual competition for scarcer public resources. The drive for successful adaptation to late capitalism foregrounds the fact that several citizens are dragooned into becoming self-enterprising subjects through workfare or quasi-coercive programmes, sometimes with the active participation of non-state agencies such as charities, to whom these roles are subcontracted. Consequently, even the voluntary sector finds itself in a structurally paradoxical position of acting as a buffer for state retrenchment from social welfare while facilitating ways of socialising communities and marginalised people to cope with the perpetual competitiveness and insecurities of market society and austerity programmes. What has become a hegemonic vision of 'doing good' sustains parochial, minimalist views of citizen activism: civic but not necessarily public in scope, local rather than national in scale. Crucially, too, relocating the boundaries of society back to the private domains of neighbourhood and households regressively pushes 'necessary social labour' onto women and families (Levitas, 2012: 32). This construct of society supports a defeatist and deceitful narrative of unity which privileges loose associational networks over solidaristic movements. Visions of the great society propose weak, minimalist counterpoints to the collective damage that has been wrought in many communities over decades. Given that the state has forfeited its authority and will to address all collective needs and insecurities, the logic goes, there is little

option but to reinstate a different imaginary of the public realm that fits current realities.

Similarly, in their different ways, conservative and ordoliberal-inspired constructions of civil society sustain the view that legitimate charitable activities ought to be restricted to narrow, ‘apolitical’ activities within culturally confined private spheres (Habermas, 1992). This excludes critique or advocacy even in moderate forms. Although it is outside the scope of this paper, it is salutary to review the growing confidence with which governments in Western democracies and elsewhere are engaging in authoritarian pushback against civil bodies that present critical or oppositional agendas (Sidel, 2016; Civicus, 2016). Activities that are perceived to be critical of current social policies have come under attack from the political Right in recent years in Britain, signalling a further breach of the settlement that was struck between civil society and government in the 1990s. The examples range from populist campaigns to ‘repatriate’ overseas aid budgets (UK) or US Republican restrictions on public funding for birth control services, or through the further regulation of charitable funding on the basis of tackling theft, waste and malpractice by the charitable sector (BBC news online, September 1; Telegraph, September 13, 2016).

The backlash against the charitable sector in Britain has coincided with recent, highly-publicised events such as the collapse of major charities (Kid’s Company and Lifeline, for example) and revelations about dubious fund-raising tactics that were used by some charities. Charitable governance is a highly sensitive and complex area, and there are legitimate grounds for increasing regulation. But transparency easily slides into adversarial political intervention, as observable in the case of the *Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014*. Enacted on the pretext of cleaning up corruption and extending transparency in non-governmental organisations, this law draws charities, trade unions, student unions, and campaigning groups into the orbit of legislation on the same basis as corporate lobbyists and orchestrated electoral fraud. Equally, measures such as the ill-fated ‘anti-lobbying clause’ quickly gained the appearance of political vindictiveness rather than genuinely protecting the use of public funds. In 2016, The Cabinet Office attempted to prohibit the voluntary sector from using ‘taxpayer funds’ to engage in public advocacy or advertising campaigns. Similar measures have been passed in Australia and the US. Regulatory bodies have also been threatened with dissolution or privatisation, including the National Audit Office, while the powers of Charity Commission and the Fundraising Standards Board have been more closely prescribed (Cabinet Office, 2 February, 2016).

It is important not to oversimplify complex developments as these different issues span a spectrum of concerns from possible illegality to overdependence on state contracting, alongside legitimate concerns about the proper conduct of charities and the appropriate regulation by law of their activities. But these actions have cumulatively contributed to widespread concern in civil society about the normalisation of practices such as ‘gagging clauses’, contractual restrictions and other fundamental attacks by government on its independence in the years ahead (Civil Exchange, 2016)

Conclusion

Of course, the mere existence of grand political projects and their relationship with hegemonic interests do not necessarily translate into daily experience. Ironically, the exposure of individuals to the full force of neoliberal responsabilisation, which includes taking personal onus for failures as well as successes, is provoking a wave of consciousness as to our subjective vulnerabilities and fallibilities. Commentators hypothesise that the contemporary turn to community and locality is a defensive backlash against anomic life under capitalist globalisation (Levitas, 2012). Such reactions are said to reflect a desire for renewed solidarity as citizens re-evaluate their lot by turning to mutual recognition and the care of others in an apparent rebuke to market hegemony. Contradictorily, it seems that market societies have inspired a ‘humanitarianisation of the public sphere’ wherein ‘depoliticised action become paradigmatic acts of citizenship’ (Muehlebach, 2012: 133). As ethical citizenship movements spread, such acts of citizenships also find visibility at elite levels where, for example, supranational philanthrocapitalism enjoys an unprecedented global profile in the aftermath of the accumulation of vast fortunes by individuals and families from the 1970s (Anheier and Leat, 2006; Bishop and Green, 2008). Additionally, in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, a new trend emerged whereby global elites voluntarily (and conspicuously) joined in direct economic re-distribution, albeit through self-founded philanthropic foundations established. This phenomenon has been the subject of scholarly work which revealed the legitimating calculations behind the rise of corporate philanthropy. Bishop and Green’s (2008) study of the rise of elite charitable activity after the crisis observed that:

... in the boardrooms of multinationals now, there is an understanding that as they think long term, *they have to be* on the right side of social progress; *they have to be part of the solution rather than part of the*

problem. This is, in my mind, a complete shift of thinking that is taking place (Cho, 2010, emphasis added).

On the quotidian level, the social landscape is filling up with volunteering campaigns, environmental conservation projects, food banks, and all kinds of community-building and altruistic movements. Youth associations, colleges and Universities are busily engaged in cultivating a habitus of giving among younger citizens in the form of quasi- 'employability' opportunities or internships and work experience programmes. A cottage industry of prisoner peer-mentoring and 'offender user voice' projects have stemmed from this self-help movement, some of which are assertively self-determining while others alarmingly mimic official crime reduction and offender 'management' agendas (Buck, 2016). Whilst the cult of altruistic giving is widely celebrated as evidence of an emerging post-neoliberal consciousness, it also entails the cheap reproduction of caring and subsistence work, often in unspoken gendered and classed terms (Levitas 2012: 32). Arguably, this is not just about the devaluation of social labour or its transference back to the private domain but a consensually offered appropriation of surplus labour value. As Muehlebach (2012: 11) observes, "a much deeper shift is at work – one that is seeing the rewriting of the larger signifying social and cultural whole within which free labour, conceptualized as a pure, free gift to the collective, is now an increasingly significant part".

Similarly, and especially at the time of writing, we are awakened to the many ways in which the politics of yearning is also taking us on a very different course as wildfire ethno-nationalist reaction and insularity appear to have taken hold in several continents. Millions of citizens, from intelligentsia of the right and left as well as workers and disenfranchised communities, are returning to known solidarities, where the nostalgia of place is interwoven with anti-immigration and counter-multiculturalist sympathy. The essential paradox is that affective association reflects a pervasive desire to reconstruct *identity* and *place* in the face of dissolving collective structures and solidarities. Participation in this sense accentuates the structures of feeling that offer empowerment at a personal level in fulfilment of the desire for community and to offset the alienating emotions of competition and self-judgement. Feeling and empathy underscore affective generosity and giving which apparently run against the historical grain of selfish individualism or denial of the other. Citizens are invited to feel for and reach out to subaltern others.

There are tensions between these demonstrations both of social empathy and of enterprising self-investment. On the one hand, they show how interconnected we are as social and economic agents. On the other hand,

Muehlebach's (2012) work in particular brilliantly demonstrates how necessary affective relations are to the reproduction of neoliberal capitalism. Late modern capitalism animates and privileges certain forms of solidarity and kinship while marginalising others, and as such generates superficial forms of 'recognition without solidarity' (Alexander, 2006: 398). It is not true, therefore, that the withdrawal of the state has eliminated all forms of social empathy. However, it is insufficient to presume that the current politics of affective giving departs from characteristically neoliberal ways of unlocking human potential. Volunteering, philanthropy and community offer templates for advancing neoliberal versions of good citizenship by valuing private action over collective- or class-conscious solidarities. Further work and a more precise understanding of these relationships are needed.

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