Chapter 7

Social Housing and the "New Localism": A Strategy of Governance for Austere Times

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A defining feature of contemporary governance is its variegated nature. It comprises non-market as well as market based technologies of power, that work through the social capital and social bonds that bind people together. No longer is the state expected to solve all of society's problems. Rather individuals are to be mobilised to take control of their own well-being and destiny, through policies which emphasise voluntary endeavour, self-determination and local control. The flip side of this devolution of autonomy is however heightened responsibilisation, and the retrenchment of the role of the state in public life.

These changing state-citizen relations are highly visible within housing policy across the UK, as reflected in the policy narratives of the big society and localism. Drawing on the policy imaginary of community-asset ownership in Scotland, this paper explores the way in which governmental policies have sought to empower local people and place-based communities, as a strategy to tackle the problem of welfare dependency during austere times. As the chapter will examine, this reflects particular understandings of the causes and solutions to place-based inequality, and the production of "good" and "bad" citizens more broadly. A binary division is constructed here between "responsible" consumer-citizens who can enterprise their own lives and consume goods and services on the market, and those who are problematized because they are "dependent" on the state to provide housing for them (Flint 2003). Encouraging social housing tenants to become more empowered, self-reliant

and actively involved in decisions affecting their housing has therefore emerged as a key governmental strategy targeted at those for whom the market has failed.

Influenced by "ethnographies of government" this paper also seeks to go beyond an analysis solely of policy discourses, and illuminate the way in which governable subjects may challenge, contest, resist and show ambivalence towards particular technologies of power which seek to mobilise, shape and regulate their conduct towards particular ends (see for example, Brady 2014; Li 2014, 2007; McKee 2009). This underscores the way in which power's effects can never be guaranteed, for projects of rule are messy, unstable and continually subject to challenge from above and below. As John Clarke (2004) has argued, governable subjects are fundamentally "subjects of doubt": they do not always come when power calls their name. This fundamental tension is the conceptual starting point for this paper. It supports a more nuanced study of projects of rule that is both temporally and spatially sensitive, and reflects the variegated and contested nature of contemporary governing practices.

To critically explore these key issues, the paper is divided into four sections. First, it briefly outlines the impact of the global credit crunch on housing policy and outcomes, before tracing the emergence of "the new localism" as a contemporary strategy of government designed to empower local people and communities in austere times. This is followed by a discussion of the empirical data which highlights how the language of community-asset ownership has been utilised within Scottish housing and regeneration policy. Given the devolved nature of public policy making in the UK it is no longer possible to talk of a British experience, if indeed it ever was (Muir and McKee 2015). This section will highlight how the skills, time, resources and energy of local people are regarded as assets to be "activated"

in order to tackle societal problems at the local scale; thus making people less reliant on state services. With reference to the case study of the Glasgow housing stock transfer, the final empirical section will illuminate how the ways in which social housing tenants navigate policy and political discourses of empowerment is highly variable, contingent and messy. These lessons are highly relevant to other places and policy contexts which seek to empower local people through the management and ownership of local assets. The chapter will then conclude by arguing for more empirically rich ethnographies of government, which can help illuminate the messy and contested nature of contemporary governing practices.

From Broken Britain to Localism

The global credit crunch of 2007-8 illuminated only too clearly the relationship between housing, global financial flows and economic instability; not least the way in which economies are vulnerable to shifts in the value of housing assets (Kennett et al 2013; McKee and Muir 2013). The fallout from the credit crunch had a devastating effect on housing markets within the UK. House prices fell dramatically; repossessions and evictions rose; whilst tightening mortgage lending criteria made it increasingly difficult for people to get on the housing ladder, especially First Time Buyers (Kennett et al 2013). This exacerbated already existing spatial and generational inequalities, and pushed more people, especially at the lower end of the age and income scale into rental housing in the private sector. The sector now houses around 14 per cent of households in Scotland, which represents a doubling of the 1991 Census figure. This reflects not only challenges in accessing social housing, but also stagnation in levels of homeownership.

What is especially interesting about the credit crunch is the way in which it was constructed by national governments, who quickly shifted it from being a financial crisis affecting the banking sector, to a fiscal crisis affecting government spending. It is a pertinent example of an ideological reworking of what was initially an economic problem into a political argument for public sector reform and state retrenchment (Clarke and Newman 2012); one that has ushered in a new era of fiscal austerity. The UK has witnessed the most fundamental transformation of the welfare state since the post-war welfare settlement was established. Crucial here has been what Clarke and Newman (2012: 309) have described as the "various imaginings of morality that occupy the spaces between economy and society" for "the politics of austerity combines an economic logic with a particular moral appeal to shared sacrifice and suffering, to fairness and freedom, to a sense of collective obligation". The imaginary of austerity has been mobilised to justify and legitimate shifting the "costs of the banking crisis away from the wealthy and on to the shoulders of ordinary people" (Ginsburg et al 2012: 297). This is evident not only in budgetary cuts to core areas of welfare spending, including social housing, but also in the increasingly punitive sanctions and conditionality being introduced through the UK government's welfare reform agenda (Hancock and Mooney 2012).

These public policy debates have crystallised in the rhetoric of "Broken Britain", which has been advanced by the Conservative government prior to the 2010 Westminster General Election. In summary, this narrative blames society's ills on "problem people" and "problem places", which have been created through decades of state welfare (for critical commentary see Manzi 2014; Jacobs and Manzi 2013; Hancock et al 2012). Whilst there are clear parallels with previous debates in the UK around the underclass and social exclusion,

there is also a new and distinctive geography at play here (McKee 2015; Tyler 2013). These narratives depict dysfunctional and chaotic lifestyles of a work-shy, feckless, criminal and welfare dependent underclass living on council-built estates. Such negative stereotypes, which serve to construct low-income households and neighbourhoods as "the other", have a strong spatial dimension and clear stigmatising affect. As Manzi (2014: 1) asserts this rhetoric represents the “culmination of a long-standing debate about the regulation of welfare”. Moreover, these narratives illuminate the power relationships that operate within and across networks, institutions and regimes, and their locations in frames of meaning. Crucially, if state welfare is the "problem", localism has been advanced as the "solution" - epitomised in Prime Minister David Cameron's big society rhetoric. As will be discussed in the next section, this is firmly an anti-statist project that seeks to reduce the size and role of the state in public life.

It is however difficult to fully appreciate the governance of welfare, and the nuances of policy formulation and implementation in the context of the UK, without acknowledging the devolution of public policy: a process that has been evolving since 1999 and the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament. Whilst some matters remain preserved powers of the UK government in London, such as defence, taxation and welfare, most areas of public policy making, including social housing, are devolved in the context of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The political geography of the UK, and ongoing debates surrounding further constitutional change following the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, therefore provide a critical backdrop to understanding contemporary governance. Not only is Scottish politics more social democratic and policy-making more consensual, but dissatisfaction with

Westminster style politics and austerity measures were important galvanisers for the sizeable yes vote (45 per cent) in the recent referendum (Mooney and Scott 2015).

Empowering the "Local": non-market technologies of government

In the UK we are witnessing the emergence of the "new localism" as a contemporary technology of power (McKee, forthcoming 2015). Whereas Broken Britain, as discussed in the previous section, reflects a right-wing analysis of the problems facing society, localism has been imagined by the Coalition government as the solution. In a period of austerity, the mobilisation of the voluntary and community sector has been at the heart of public policy reforms across the UK. Whilst the nuances vary from country to country, in broad terms the "new localism" is united by a focus on encouraging place-based communities to take responsibility for their own welfare through the ownership and management of community assets. This has resulted in the emergence of more pluralistic model of welfare provision, which gives greater prominence to the voluntary and community sector in delivering services: a shift described as the "voluntary turn" (Milligan and Conradson 2006).

Third sector organisations are deemed not only to have a critical role in service provision (at reduced cost to the public purse), but also represent key instruments for developing active citizenship and responsible community, through their close connection to the people and places they service. As Macmillan and Townsend (2006: 29) highlight, this involves “specific constructions of space, scale and temporality, which have important consequences for the shape and structure of the emerging welfare state”. Moreover, it signifies a discursive privileging of the expertise and capacities of local people to take

responsibility for their own future welfare and well-being, through becoming involved in the ownership and management of community assets. Within England these debates have been captured by the language of the big society: the Prime Minister's "big idea", which promotes self-help, volunteering, self-determination and a rolled-back state:

> "[T]here are too many parts of our society that are broken, whether it is broken families or whether it is some communities breaking down; whether it is the level of crime, the level of gang membership; whether it's problems of people stuck on welfare, unable to work; whether it's the sense that some of our public services don't work for us – we do need a social recovery to mend the broken society. To me, that's what the Big Society is […] So, what this is all about is giving people more power and control to improve their lives and their communities. That, in a nutshell, is what it is all about" (Cameron 2014: no page number).

Central here is an emphasis on redistributing power and encouraging a culture of volunteering; empowering active citizens and communities; and facilitating residents to take over local services. As Kisby asserts, the big society:

> "Is principally about citizens having a moral obligation to undertake voluntary activity in the community and to take responsibility for their own individual welfare needs. If the "big society" is largely about ordinary citizens doing their bit to keep the free market going then surely this is something even hard- line Thatcherites can embrace (2010: 486)."

This governmental ambition to mobilise community action through the bonds and attachments that people have within place-based communities is not a new idea (for excellent

historical over-view see, Ravetz 2001). It has long antecedents in housing and social policy within the UK, a point that will be returned to later in this paper. Nonetheless, it represents a striking example of what Cruikshank (1999) has described as the "Will to Empower". Writing about the American *War on Poverty* she traces the emergence of technologies of citizenship that seek to act on the actions of others by transforming political subjectivity into an instrument of government. It is a means of working through, rather than against the subjectivities of "the poor". After Foucault (2003b), this is a productive form of power that seeks to encourage active political participation by maximising the actions, motivations and interests of local people. The limits of democratic government mean however that the *War on Poverty* could not be won without the voluntary participation of the poor in resolving their own situation.

Powerlessness therefore came to be defined by government and its experts as the root cause of social problems. "The poor" thus came to be defined by what they lacked and their disinterest and apathy in turn became problematized. In the American context, as in the contemporary UK, empowerment emerged as the solution to the "problem" of poverty, and a means of stirring "the poor" into action. Crucially, this requires non-market technologies of power which seek to mobilise communities to act in their own self- interest, thus minimising reliance on both the state and markets. As Li advances:

> Governing consists in setting conditions and devising incentives so that prudent, calculating individuals and communities choosing "freely" and pursuing their own interests will contribute to the general interest as well […] Governing is a matter of "getting the incentives right" so that some conduct is encouraged and enabled, while other conduct becomes more difficult (Li 2014: 37).

The flip side of this, however, is the problematisation of people and places who "fail", or refuse, to regulate their conduct in line with governmental ambitions. Indeed, Wacquant (2008) and Tyler (2013) have drawn attention to the way in which contemporary governing strategies utilise *stigmatisation* as a mechanism by which to distinguish "the poor" as distinct from mainstream society, thus justifying targeted and punitive interventions. As Sharma elaborates:

> Neoliberalism paints a naturalised picture of poverty and powerlessness, where certain people lack the requisite attitudes and means to become rational, economic agents; the solution, therefore, is to supply them with those means and outlooks so that they can contribute to economic growth by helping themselves out of poverty. This represents the tautological thinking whereby some people are poor because they are powerless and they are powerless because they are poor; hence empowerment becomes and obvious and obviously depoliticised, bureaucratic solution to both poverty and powerlessness (Sharma 1998: 27)

Nonetheless as alluded to earlier, democratic government cannot "force its interests", rather it must enlist the willing participation of individuals, for it is a project of rule that governs people by getting them *to govern themselves*:

> 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 market or by the promise of self-government and autonomy, the object of empowerment is to act upon another's interests and desires in order to conduct their

> actions towards an appropriate end; thus "empowerment" is itself a power relationship and one deserving of careful scrutiny (Cruikshank 1999:69).

Foucauldian scholars from anthropology have been particularly adept at advancing this *careful scrutiny* by illuminating how these micro-practices of rule, which seek to mobilise and shape particular behaviours, seek to realise their effects (for useful over-view, see Brady 2014). The strength of these studies is their ability to develop detailed ethnographies of government, which challenge the presumed homogeneity of neoliberalism's effects and the reification of the state (Kerr 1999). This allows us to consider how empowerment is conceptualised and implemented as a strategy of government, and crucially, how these ideas are brought to life in people's daily practices and interactions. This offers a counter to critiques of governmentality scholars like Rose (1999), who privilege the study of the rationales of government over and above sociologies of rule. By contrast, ethnographies of government seek to unravel and document the messiness of government, including failures, fractures and disjunctures between political rationales and grass-roots programmes. After John Clarke, this chapter treats governable subjects as fundamentally "subjects of doubt", and seeks to explore the power relations and practices through which subjectivities are formed (or not, as the case may be).

The Research Context

Drawing on qualitative fieldwork conducted across multiple research projects on community-asset ownership of social housing in Scotland (2004-2014), this paper seeks to advance our understanding of the unevenness of power's effects and the struggles around

subjectivity. Community ownership refers to the Scottish housing policy of "transferring" council housing to not-for-profit housing associations located in the voluntary sector through stock transfer. It originally emerged in Glasgow in the late 1970s as a bottom-up solution to the problem of poor housing in low-income neighbourhoods. Local residents, often led by strong female figures in the community, and supported by sympathetic local officials (Young 2013), drove forward the establishment of community-based housing associations (CBHAs). Small and geographically focused these organisations are managed by a committee of ordinary local people, making them quite distinct to the "professionalised" boards typically found in larger housing associations. CBHAs have a strong reputation for community-led regeneration and tenant empowerment within the social housing sector, and are described by their champions as one of the strongest and most enduring examples of "community anchor" organisations in the UK today.

The CBHA sector has grown in size since the 1970s, supported by subsequent waves of housing stock transfer, operating at different scales from the 1980s onwards. Originating in Glasgow's council house estates as a pragmatic, bottom-up response the origins and evolution of stock transfer have been quite distinct in the Scottish context (McKee 2007). Nonetheless, across all parts of the UK the pace and scale of transfer activity accelerated under Blair's New Labour government (Pawson and Mullins 2010). Although it is now less of a political priority than it was 10-15 years ago, the political imaginary of community ownership remains important, and has resurfaced in other guises as this chapter will explore. Crucially, community ownership stock transfers contributed significantly to the growth of the CBHA movement in Scotland. A very successful and popular model of social housing ownership and management, CBHAs represent a pertinent example through which to explore

the localism agenda, and the continuity and discontinuities in policy discourses between governments in Scotland and the UK.

Community Anchor Organisations and "Asset" Based Welfare

Social housing policy in Scotland is distinctive in the UK context (McKee and Phillips 2012; Kintrea 2006). As the sector houses a larger proportion of the population, over a quarter of households in deprived urban areas, it is less stigmatised. Moreover, legislation ensures that tenants have secure, affordable tenancies and a "right to housing" under homelessness legislation. This is in stark contrast to the situation in England, where the right to a social tenancy for life has been eroded, and rents have risen due to the introduction of "affordable" rents in the 2011 Localism Act (McKee 2015; Manzi 2014). Whilst there is certainly a correlation between poverty and social housing in Scotland, the sector nonetheless houses a broader range of the population as compared to England, where provision is targeted at the most vulnerable and in greatest need. With other low-income households expected to look to the market for their housing.

Scottish housing and regeneration policy by contrast emphasises the social value of community action and endeavour: that is, the tangible and intangible benefits that can be delivered by local residents coming together to improve their neighbourhoods. This is evident historically if we look back at the policy emphasis on community ownership through different waves of housing stock transfer during the 1980s to 2000s, all of which emphasised community governance and tenant empowerment (for details see McKee 2007; Kintrea 2006). Yet this ethos is also highly visible in the contemporary regeneration policies of the

current SNP led Scottish Government. Their 2011 regeneration strategy: *Achieving a Sustainable Future* has a strong focus on community-led approaches. That is, on mobilising funding and other mechanisms to better support local people and communities to address their own social, economic and environmental problems. The skills, time, resources and energy of local people are regarded as "assets" to be activated by government in order to tackle societal problems at the local scale:

> "[Our] approach is not on the deficits of an area but rather the *assets* that communities have. To support communities to be sustainable we must identify the assets that exist – economic, physical and social – and use these assets to deliver sustainable, positive change" (Scottish Government 2011: 12: my emphasis added).

In adopting this community-led approach to regeneration the strategy incorporates the recommendations of the 2011 *Christie Commission* on the future delivery of public services in Scotland. It underlined the importance of asset-based approaches (such as community-ownership) as a key component in revitalising and transforming public service delivery:

> "Our evidence demonstrates the need for public services to […] become transparent, community-driven and designed around users' needs. They should […] work more closely with individuals and communities to understand their circumstances, needs and aspirations and enhance self-reliance and community resilience" (Christie Commission 2011: 22).

Underpinning Scottish Government strategy then is the belief that the "problems" facing Scotland's low-income neighbourhoods cannot be tackled without agencies working *together* in *partnership* with local people. Moreover for strategies to be effective,

communities need to take *responsibility* for developing their own local solutions by taking over the management and ownership of former public services:

> "Community-led regeneration is about local people identifying for *themselves* the issues and opportunities in their areas, deciding what to do about them, and being *responsible* for delivering the economic, social and environmental action that will make a difference. It is a dependent on the energy and commitment of *local people* themselves and has a wide range of benefits" (Scottish Government 2011: 20: my emphasis added).

In line with arguments advanced by Foucauldian scholars such as Rose (1999) and Cruikshank (1999) no longer is the state, either at the national or local scale, expected to solve all its citizen's problems, nor meet all their needs. Autonomy and responsibility are now to be devolved downwards through an emphasis on community empowerment and mobilising the knowledge, skills and capacities of local residents. Localism therefore represents a particular governmental understanding of both the "cause" and necessary "solution" to place-based inequalities. This spatial focus is significant, for there is a strong correlation between neighbourhoods of multiple deprivation and areas of social housing, with particular "people" and "places" being identified as needing to take greater responsibility for their own future, and avoid dependency on state provided services (Matthews 2010). Whilst this is not a new idea, it has received a growing impetus in recent years, reflected in the plethora of policy initiatives across devolved administrations and at the UK scale (Moore and McKee 2014). This is no accident. It is driven by the fiscal crisis and emerging austerity, which has impacted upon and undermined social programmes historically delivered by the state. Significant here has been the UK Welfare Reform Act 2012, which introduced a raft of

social security changes that have had the cumulative effect of tightening eligibility, increasing conditionality and reducing the state provided safety-net. These changes have hit low-income communities hard. An awareness of the broader social, economic and political context in which contemporary governance strategies are situated is therefore critical to understanding the present resurgence in localist agendas, within and beyond social housing.

Returning to the Scottish Government's (2011) regeneration document, the emerging narrative of the need for the voluntary and community sector to do more, sits in tension with references to the vibrancy and success of the sector in Scotland. The insinuation seems to be that perhaps these organisations are not fulfilling their potential. Consequently, they have been re-imagined and valorised as "community-anchor organisations" within dominant policy narratives:

> Community Anchor Organisations have strong links to their communities and usually stimulate high levels of voluntary activity. They are well placed to spot the talent and opportunities in their areas and have the energy and creativity to nurture and exploit those. Increasingly, these organisations take an enterprising and assets based approach to their work (Scottish Government 2014: 2)

This subtle shift in language is important for the subject-making that is at the heart of the "new localism". Anchor-organisations are defined by the Scottish Government as: being controlled by local residents; having a proven track record of delivering community activities; actively engaging with all sections of its local community and supporting community development; working with partners in the public, private and third sectors to deliver services in a holistic way; and able to lever in additional monies and opportunities.

These attributes suggest a communitarian endeavour that reduces reliance on the state, instead, encouraging communities to take the lead for themselves by self-organising. Indeed, the document continually states the need for a "shared approach to tackling the problems of the most disadvantaged areas" (2011: 48). This premise is also visible beyond housing and regeneration policy, as epitomised by the 2014 Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill. As the policy memorandum associated with this legislation underlines:

> The Scottish Government believes that Scotland's people are its greatest asset: they are best placed to make decisions about our future, and to know what is needed to deliver sustainable and resilient communities. A key aim underpinning the Scottish Government's core purpose is to create the conditions for community empowerment […] In line with trusting the people who live and work in Scotland to make decisions about the nation's future, the essence of self-determination, the Scottish Government is also committed to supporting subsidiarity and local decision-making (2014: 1).

Whilst clearly evoking the "Will to Empower" what this quotation also illuminates is that the language of "localism" in Scotland has a distinctive emphasis, being underpinned by a nationalist political commitment to self-determination (at a variety of scales) that is absent from debates elsewhere in the UK. Nonetheless "community anchors" retains a popular currency in policy-making across the UK, with "place" playing a key role in political narratives:

> Strong, sustainable community-based organisations can provide a crucial focus and support for community development and change in their neighbourhood and community. We are calling them "community anchor organisations" because of the

> solid foundation they give to a wide variety of self-help and capacity building activities in local communities, and because of their roots within their communities (Home Office 2004: 21).

Nonetheless, clear tensions remain within Scottish Government policy reflecting not only a lack of joined up thinking, but the very fact that the state is not a single, homogenous entity: it is characterised by multiple actors pulling in different directions. This becomes only too evident when we consider the perspectives of housing professionals. The housing association movement has grown in scale significantly since the 1980s, and is now the main provider of social housing for rent. Staff within this sector therefore have a key role to play in translating governmental objectives, as imagined by policy narratives, into practice. Whilst this means they are themselves subject to projects of rule in the form of audit and inspection of their professional performance (McKee 2009b), they are also expected to encourage, cajole and maximise the active participation of their tenants and residents towards local community action. As Flint asserts:

> Social housing professionals may be conceptualized as […] transmitters of knowledge to their working-class "clients" whose conduct they seek to shape in relation to a set of constructed codes of normalized and responsible behaviour, influenced by, but certainly not wholly convergent with, directives and discourse from central government (2003: 615).

When interviewed, senior housing association staff spoke positively about the language of community-anchors, perceiving it as highly relevant for their organisations. They regarded it as a metaphor that strongly connected with their ethos, and the mission

statement of their organisations, especially their aspiration to play a greater role in minimising the negative impact of public sector cuts within their communities. In particular, interviewees were keen to stress CBHA's already existing local asset-base, place-based focus and strong relationship with their communities and other partners. They regarded themselves as more than landlords with responsibility for the "bricks and mortars" of their properties, and indeed, saw themselves as community organisations concerned with the wider social, economic and environmental circumstances within their local area of operation. Many provided a range of community projects designed to help people build their skills and confidence, find employment, engage in volunteering and improve their health and well-being (McKee, forthcoming 2015). Moreover, CBHAs already have governance structures premised on the principle of community-asset ownership. They are owned and managed by local people, governed via a management committee comprising a majority of local tenants and residents. They are also regulated social businesses with a proven track record of successful service delivery and partnership working:

> If you look at the definition of [community anchors], it could be forests, it could be a recycling organisation, it could be a faith based group in some communities. So it doesn't have to be a housing association. It just so happens that in a lot of areas the most robust and sensible organization is the housing association (Interview 2, Senior Officer, Membership Organisation).

The language of community-anchors, which brings into focus local aspects of place and the social glue that binds people together, is a central element to this contemporary, and distinctly Scottish, strategy of empowerment. Through this imaginary and rhetoric community organisations, and local people, are being mobilised not only in terms of their place-based

identity but also in pursuit of the "Will to Empower" (Cruikshank 1999). Whilst this may bring positive benefits for people and places, it is nonetheless a relationship of power that needs to be subject to critical scrutiny, for it involves the shaping of behaviour towards particular governmental ends, as well as a fundamental rolling back of the state.

Indeed, the housing professionals interviewed did not embrace the idea of anchor-organisations uncritically. They were universally keen to distance themselves from the language of the Big Society which they dismissed as an "English" and "Tory" idea. By contrast the language of community-anchors, and its emphasis on participation and volunteering at the local scale, was deemed to be more in tune with traditional Scottish working class values around community mutual support. This perhaps reflects the origins of CBHAs, which emerged as a genuinely grass-roots response in areas of significant multiple deprivation (Young 2013; Paddison et al 2008; Clapham et al 1996); but also the strength of the "assets-based approach" to public sector reform which has gained momentum in Scotland over the last decade. This public service model is highly pertinent and distinctive in a UK context. Whilst the Localism Act 2011 in England actively eroded the state provided welfare safety net by ending security of tenure for social housing tenants and introducing more market-based rents, the Scottish Government has adopted a different tact. The emphasis in Scotland has been on joint working, co-production, and making the most of existing community "assets" in order to positively transform public services for the benefit of end-users.

Nonetheless this assets-based approach with its emphasis on shared solutions is not without critique. Senior housing association staff questioned central and local government presumptions that housing associations would fill the gap in public services caused by

welfare state retrenchment. They expressed concern that this may result in a blurring of the boundaries between public and third sector providers. Moreover, they were keen to emphasise that austerity had also created financial challenges for housing associations, and that this impacted on their ability to resource community projects in the way that they (and government) would like. For example, welfare reform made it more difficult for them to collect rents from their low-income client group that could then be invested in local projects, whilst mitigating the impact of the reforms through providing advice and support services also reduced the monies available for them to spend on more traditional community development work.

Even more fundamentally, housing professionals questioned whether "the local" was the appropriate scale at which to tackle social problems, like poverty, unemployment and poor health. Tensions were also evident in terms of *whose responsibility* it should be to meet these complex social problems and ensure citizens' welfare needs are met. The crux of professional's frustration was the expectation that housing associations were expected to do more and more to meet the needs of households in low-income communities, yet did not perceive this to be matched by financial or policy support for housing associations from the Scottish Government. This underlines a core tension around the appropriate scale of policy interventions needed to tackle place-based inequalities, as well as the shifting nature of the social contract between the state and its citizens, and the role of the voluntary and community sector within this.

These points of contestation, not only underline the importance of contextualising local and national policy debates within broader macro-economic processes, but more importantly perhaps, illuminate the ability of "welfare professionals" to act and think

otherwise (Barnes and Prior 2009). They are, as Clarke (2004) has argued, fundamentally "subjects of doubt" and do not simply enact policy uncritically or without reflection. Whilst government has increasingly come to rely on housing associations to deliver their social housing policies, they are nonetheless independent organisations outwith direct state control. Securing their consent and compliance with particular policy objectives, community-anchors being just one example, highlights the challenge of translating political rationales into successful governmental programmes on the ground in this era of decentred, network governance (Bevir 2013; Rhodes 1997). As Foucault (2003b) emphasises, power's effect cannot be guaranteed, and governmental objectives are not always realised in practice given the plethora of social actors and institutions involved, and thus the inevitable messiness of projects of rule.

As the next section will explore, it is not only front-line housing professionals and the housing organisations they represent who have expressed ambiguity and dissent towards particular policy and political narratives. Social housing tenants themselves have also shown themselves to be fundamentally "subjects of doubt".

"Activating" the Empowered Tenant through Community Ownership

Empowering local residents is by no means a new public policy preoccupation. Parties across the political spectrum have long supported initiatives around greater involvement, participation and voice within social housing, as well as the ability to exit the sector altogether (Jacobs and Manzi 2013). Notable examples within Scottish social housing policy include: the statutory right to tenant participation; the sale of council housing to

housing associations through "community ownership" neighbourhood-level stock transfers; and the Thatcherite housing policy that afforded sitting council tenants the "right to buy" their home (McKee and Phillips 2012). These measures reflect the rise of the citizen-consumer in social policy more generally (Clarke et al 2007), a governance shift that has gained momentum as public sector budgets have come under increasing pressures, and the subsequent mobilisation of the "local" (McKee, forthcoming 2015).

The policy of community ownership of social housing that was promoted in Scotland in the early 2000s offers an interesting example through which to unravel and investigate these govern-mentalities of rule, and the tensions provoked and created. The remainder of this section considers this governance shift through the case study of Glasgow, Scotland's largest urban conurbation. Given the long legacy of community ownership in the city and the explicit promises made within the Glasgow transfer agreement regarding tenant empowerment, it is a highly relevant example by which to consider these policy narratives. Attempts to devolve governance and empower Glasgow's tenants offers policy and theoretical lessons for other contexts; although as the previous section outlined, faith in assets-based approaches remains strong within Scotland's policy community. It is important to note that this section focuses on the initial period post-transfer 2004-2008; an update is provided at the end on key governance developments since.

The drivers for community ownership in Glasgow were poor condition of the housing stock and constrained public sector budgets. Glasgow's de-industrialisation resulted in a decline in the fortunes of the city's public sector housing. This manifest itself in terms of disinvestment, with rents largely going towards servicing historic debts, and a remote and paternalistic approach to housing management. To fund a much needed refurbishment

programme within the constraints of public sector finances, the city council proposed to sell off its housing to the newly created Glasgow Housing Association (GHA). Despite an active "no" campaign driven by trade unionist, tenant and left-wing opposition, a majority voted yes to the proposals and the sale was enacted in 2003 making GHA Europe's largest social landlord. The stock transfer was highly significant in policy terms given the historical importance of social housing to the council's political power base.

Explicit in the pre-transfer campaign and statutory consultations issued was a strong commitment to local control and "community ownership" of the housing. Whilst GHA was the landlord, rent-collector and owner of the housing, in accordance with the principles of the transfer agreement it devolved day-to-day management of its housing to a city-wide network of 60+ Local Housing Organisations (LHOs). These neighbourhood level organisations were in turn governed by committees of local residents, comprising of a tenant majority. They are responsible for local housing strategy, deciding for example, how to spend allocated resources, and how to implement planned refurbishment programmes (for detailed discussion see, McKee 2007). The relationship between the GHA and the LHOs was governed by a two-way service contract with the performance of both parties measured by their ability to meet key performance indicators.

Local control was however to be only the first step on the pathway to full "community ownership", as Glasgow's transfer was sold to tenants on the belief that these LHOs would eventually become the owners as well as the managers of the housing: either by becoming independent housing associations in their own right, or linking in with existing CBHAs (for detailed discussion, see McKee 2011). This was to be achieved via further secondary neighbourhood level stock transfers in order to recreate the success of Scotland's CBHA

model: small, community-based associations. This process was referred to as Second Stage Transfer (SST). Glasgow thus represents a strong example of the narrative of community ownership of social housing in practice:

> This Framework will allow the opportunity to develop new and radical forms of local housing management, ownership and community-based regeneration. Local people must be at the centre of change in realising better housing and better-equipped organisations to deliver improved housing management and repair services […] The proposition we have commended is one which allows that evolution to a local level to take place in accordance with community capacity and choice. Change must be driven forward by communities at that local level (Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Executive 2000: 2).

By emphasising transformations in housing governance and the mobilisation of local knowledge, activity and skills the Glasgow community ownership stock transfer clearly embodies what Cruikshank (1999) describes as a political "Will to Empower". Central to the discursive narrative of community ownership is an emphasis on:

- Choice - through transferring ownership and control of council-built housing to alternative social landlords (e.g. housing associations and co-operatives)
- Agency – through empowering tenants to become actively engaged in the management and ownership of their housing at the local scale
- Responsibility – through devolving decision making powers and accountability to active citizens/communities

Qualitative research with tenants however highlights that the way in which governable subjects navigate policy and political discourses of empowerment is highly variable, and not always consistent. Their perspectives are marked by both ambivalence and ambiguity, at the same time as interest and passion. For example, tenants spoke eagerly about positive changes that had occurred since the stock transfer, both in terms of improvements in the physical fabric of their homes and communities, as well as more general involvement in local decision making:

> *What aspects of being on the committee do you enjoy?*
>
> The fact we can say no we're no having that, we've now got some say in what we can do. In the past, when we went to the [Council] it was a case of this is the budget; this is what we've planned. And it didn't matter if you say "oh no I think that should have been done" that was it. So just now we can sit and talk […] and we will pick the colours of the houses. Things you never got involved in before (LHO Committee Member)

Despite clear echoes of the "Will to Empower" local people, especially those involved in LHO governing bodies, stressed tensions in the delegated governance model. This pertained largely to the LHO's limited financial autonomy and lack of ownership of the housing assets – both of which were sources of considerable frustration to tenant committee members. This underlines the point that the devolution of decision-making is not always matched by the devolution of resources. This is evident in the following quote in which a tenant committee member laments the use of standardised city-wide procurement practices that neglects perceived "local" needs. The key point here is that the GHA, not the LHOs, control the financial purse strings:

> [the GHA] have still got a wee bit of the old Glasgow city council in them: one size fits all. So they're putting what it costs for one kitchen in the city that's the price for every kitchen in the city and it doesn't work. So I mean if you're kitchen costs two thousand pounds and I've got a kitchen double the size of yours, it's still only two thousand pounds that's getting spent on it. Which is daft (LHO Committee Member).

Central-local tensions were a defining feature of the research, for the management agreement between the LHO and the GHA locked both parties into a mutually dependent relationship. LHOs were reliant on services provided centrally by the GHA such as IT systems and legal advice, which in turn impacted on their ability to manage their housing at the local level. For example, their local arrears management may be effected by centrally provided computer systems failings, or delays in the centrally based legal team processing requests for court action. These tensions manifest themselves in an "us versus them" mentality, with the LHOs perceiving themselves to be in a subservient relationship to the GHA, who in turn exercised centralised control. The management agreement was a key source of frustration, because the functional responsibilities regarded as being at the core of "community ownership" such as ownership of the housing stock and setting and controlling of budgets were retained by the GHA – not the LHOs. This contributed to the perception that the GHA was "just the council with another name". Second stage transfer was therefore regarded as critical to LHOs aspirations for local autonomy and community ownership, as one staff member reflected:

How will things change post Second Stage Transfer?

I think obviously you'll be a stand-alone organisation; you are not dependent on GHA releasing this money, releasing that money […] At the end of the day that's what the transfer was all about wasn't it, it was about getting more local control for people in the area (LHO Housing Officer, GHA)

If LHOs were frustrated by the devolved governance arrangements, the broader tenant body were even more sceptical and unconvinced by the "Will to Empower". They demonstrated a very instrumental view towards their participation, articulating it as a means to an end: to secure investment in their homes and improve their housing, and were not necessarily attracted to the notion of community ownership or empowerment per se. Indeed, the majority who participated in focus groups on this topic expressed no demand for continual, formal involvement. They had little day-to-day contact with their landlord other than when they had a grievance to raise such as the need for a repair or to make an anti-social behaviour complaint. Furthermore, when pushed on the practicalities of devolved decision-making several outright rejected the level of responsibility that community-ownership demanded of local people, retorting that this is what housing professionals were paid for:

You need the professionals to be quite honest with you […] I wouldn't like to make those decisions […] as I say we need the professional people. I wouldn't make the

> decisions, no way […] there's no way I would make decisions for all these people (GHA Tenant, Focus Group 5).

Such responses were in turn interpreted and problematized by housing professionals as "apathy", which they endeavoured to address through an array of initiatives designed to encourage their residents to engage with them, and to become more involved in local decision making. Yet community ownership not only sought to mobilise "active" tenant participation, but also to shape the very nature of engagement, a goal to be achieved through funding and provision of "tenant training". The aim here was to build confidence, capacity and thus enable people to feed their "local knowledge" into decision making processes, therefore channelling the active agency of tenants towards governmental ends.

This chimes with the arguments advanced by scholars such as Li (2014, 2007), Sharma (2008) and Cruikshank (1999) who draw attention to the empowerment of the "powerless" as a governmental solution to the problem of poverty. Interestingly such empowerment strategies are never targeted at "responsible" homeowners in middle class private estates; only those dependent on state services, and for whom the market has failed. Indeed, commentators have questioned whether this rescaling of policy interventions might lead to the "localization of policy failure" (Macmillan and Townsend 2006: 19-22), a point encapsulated in this interview with a member of an LHO governing body reflecting on the responsibility of their role:

> [Community ownership] offers choice. It offers control, which is really important (and) with all this control and choice comes responsibility. It was dead easy years ago for committee members or community activists to say "ooh it was the council, but no

> we’re great" but then suddenly it will be us and I think we’ll need to learn to say "wait a minute the buck stops here". With all this choice comes an awful lot of responsibility (LHO Committee Member).

Yet individuals are constructed not only as empowered citizens but also active consumers, capable of, and expected to, exercise choice within the market. Those unable to secure their own welfare through normal acts of consumption are in turn regarded as "flawed consumers" and denigrated and problematised as "failures" (see for example, Arthurson et al 2014; Flint 2003). Within housing policy this marker of social difference manifests itself in the valorisation of homeownership and subsequent stigmatisation of social housing as the "tenure of last resort". Housing in the UK is a key symbol of social status and success. Moreover, there is a strong spatial dimension to this social positioning as Wacquant (2008) and others have elaborated in their discussions of "territorial stigmatisation".

Within the social housing sector the introduction of consumerist principles are only too apparent, and have been heightened through the growth of the housing association movement through stock transfer. The quasi-private identity of transfer housing associations has required them to become more business-like and customer focused in order to protect their asset-base and income streams. As one prominent tenant committee member reflected:

> It’s only really since the stock transfer […] They never called the tenant a customer before. They didn’t have a customer base it was just a tenant and they needed a house. [Going to the council housing department] was like going to the doctors or the dentists or going to a hospital appointment. Because they were the professionals and they knew better (LHO Committee Member).

Social landlords can however only deliver this from a position of knowledge: this requires soliciting the active engagement, feedback and participation of their tenant customers, so services and policies can be tailored to local needs and priorities. More fundamentally, and in line with the "new localism", it also requires landlords to mobilise their tenants to behave like "active" consumers: to secure their own future through quasi-market processes, and reduce their dependency on public provided services. Other examples of the quasi-marketization of the sector include: the introduction of choice-based letting schemes, which require tenants to shop around for a property using estate-agent style advertising; and the introduction of private-sector technologies in the form of contracts like "good neighbour agreements" (Flint 2003). More recently, housing associations have become key agents, working with government, to deliver alternative housing tenures including low-cost homeownership and mid-market rent (McKee 2011). The changing financial climate in the social housing sector means they now have to offer a wider array of housing "products" to different "client" groups. What unites these initiatives is that they are technologies of governance targeted at low-income groups for whom traditional market mechanisms have proved ineffective.

Yet as Clarke (2007) argues, consumerism within the public sector "is not like shopping" (see also, Bevir and Trentmann 2007). Indeed, the extent to which social housing tenants really have a "choice" and the ability to "voice" their concerns and "exit" their current service is highly doubtful (Hirschman 1970). Choice is highly constrained and contingent on material resources: Glasgow's social housing neighbourhoods are areas of significant multiple deprivation. This consumerist rhetoric therefore opens up questions regarding the extent to which transformations in housing governance can really address the scale and

complexity of the daily challenges faced by households living in the city's most fragile communities. The danger here is that tenant empowerment simply becomes a policy panacea, deflecting attention from the root cause of the problem: long and entrenched patterns of social and spatial inequalities.

The case study of the Glasgow housing stock transfer is therefore illustrative on many levels. Firstly, it highlights an important juncture in the shift towards asset based approaches to regenerating low-income communities, as epitomised by the "new localism". No longer is the state expected to solve all of society's problems rather the public, and the voluntary and community, sectors are to work together with local people to transform Scotland's low-income communities. Glasgow's stock transfer was an early and striking example of this policy narrative. Whilst the language in Scotland is certainly more positive and collectivist than that of the Big Society in England, it nonetheless continues to blur the boundary between the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. Furthermore, an analysis of tenants' perspectives indicates a stark difference between political rationales as articulated in key policy documents and the views expressed by local people, which is in turn a product of their own life experiences and social-spatial identities. The Glasgow transfer is therefore a strong example of how local people identified with, but simultaneously challenged, contested and questioned the echoes of the "Will to Empower". It clearly illuminates Clarke's (2004) argument that people do not always come when power calls their name. This chapter argues that we need to make this the starting point, not an afterthought, in our analysis of governing practices. Glasgow's experience therefore has broader resonance for other policy arenas concerned with community-assets and community empowerment. Whilst it is easy to be romantic about the

positive potential of such policy goals, this case study highlights a process fraught with challenges, tensions and contradictions.

Since fieldwork for this research on Glasgow's stock transfer ended social housing governance in the city has undergone further change. Since 2008 over 30 tenant ballots on Second Stage Transfer have been undertaken, with nearly all resulting in "yes" votes from tenants, and the housing being transferred from the GHA to the LHOs. Whilst these tenants have been able to realise their ambitions for community ownership, the majority will however remain with the GHA as their landlord. This in turn raises questions about the promises made to tenants during the original Glasgow transfer ballot from the city council, and the extent to which they could ever be honoured. Crucially, it also highlights a real lack of strategic direction within the GHA, especially with regards to how community ownership would be delivered for tenants in practice through SST (Murphy 2013; McKee 2007). One of the unstudied areas with regards to the Glasgow experience is tenant's reason for voting no to community ownership. This offers an interesting avenue through which to further explore the "Will to Empower". Specifically, governable subjects capacity to think and act otherwise.

Conclusion

Drawing on the example of community asset ownership within social housing in Scotland this chapter has traced the shifting nature of state-citizen relations in austere times. With reference to the "mobilisation of the local" and the promotion of activated, empowered, citizen-consumers it has illuminated the emergence of asset-based approaches to solving the

problems of poverty and place within low-income communities. It is argued this represents an increasingly important policy and political narrative in the context of austerity and fiscal restraint. But also, that it reflects a particular understanding of poverty and its causes, premised on a binary division between "good" and "bad" citizens – that is, those who can consume goods and services on the market and those that cannot. Yet contemporary governance comprises of more than simply neo-liberal governmentalities, for non-market technologies of governance are also crucial in governing the conduct of those subjects for whom the market has failed.

In addition, what both the policy case studies (community anchor housing associations and community ownership stock transfers) highlight is the fundamental paradox at the heart of the "will to empower": it embodies regulatory as well as liberatory possibilities. Whilst the Scottish CBHA movement illuminates only too clearly the potential of localist housing solutions and community governance, and the capacity and energy of local people to do things for themselves, the empirical data also underscores the inherent challenges, tensions and contradictions at play. It is therefore important to get beyond normative ways of thinking, for as Foucault reminds us "everything is dangerous", even empowerment. These critiques and insights from post-structuralist theory should not however be read as anti-democratic, rather as an attempt to highlight how the governable subject is constituted through practices of power.

Moreover, the chapter also underlines that decentred and diffuse modes of governing do not necessarily mean less government. Furthermore, by advocating an ethnographic approach to the study of governing in situ this papers argues there is much to be learned from the messy sociologies of rule, not least the way in which "governable subjects" may

challenge dominant narratives both from above and below. The case study of the Glasgow "community ownership" stock transfer and the more recent emphasis on community anchors in Scottish regeneration policy both highlight this in different ways. Such a grounded approach opens up a critical space in which to consider resistance and contestation in a more nuanced, reflexive and detailed way, by teasing out the importance of local context and subjective experiences of governing practices. This not only addresses an important gap within governmentality theory, but also facilities a more temporal and spatially sensitive account, which avoids reifying the state.

Acknowledgements

My ESRC funded seminar series on the *Big Society, Localism and Housing Policy (2012-14)* (ES/J021172/1), and the discussions that emerged from it, helped frame this paper conceptually and tighten the arguments within it. But this paper draws primarily on empirical data from multiple qualitative research projects I have been involved in during 2004 – 2012: *Reconfiguring Housing Governance in Glasgow Post-stock Transfer: regulatory and liberatory possibilities* (ESRC PhD Studentship PTA-030-2003-0-01008); *Empowering Glasgow's Tenants through Community Ownership: a tenants' perspective* (British Academy SG 50318); *Community Controlled Housing Organisations and Regeneration* (Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations); and *Scotland's Community-Based Housing Association Movement: the epitome of the Big Society?* (Carnegie Small Grant).

Special thanks to Sharon Leahy, John Flint and Peter Matthews for offering detailed comments on earlier drafts of this chapter. Responsibility as ever lies with the author.

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