Neoliberalism: An ideology, a mode of regulation or a governmentality?

Introduction

In an article reflecting on the status of academic debates on neoliberalism written in the wake of the global financial crisis, John Clarke (2008: 135) argued that the concept of neoliberalism 'is now so overused that it should be retired'. Jamie Peck (2013: 133), another prominent observer of neoliberalism, has similarly railed against the promiscuousness of the concept:

> Neoliberalism has always been an unloved, rascal concept, mainly deployed with pejorative intent, yet at the same time apparently increasingly promiscuous in application. For some, it is the spider at the center of the hegemonic web that is worldwide market rule. For others, it is a bloated, jumbo concept of little utility, or worse, a cover for crudely deterministic claims tantamount to conspiracy theorizing or closet structuralism. Post-structuralist critics, even those that use the term, are wont to argue with some justification that the concept of neoliberalism is too often 'inflated' or 'overblown'… and that it is frequently deployed in a manner that less than convincingly 'accelerates', in explanatory terms, from specific circumstances to large claims.

This article represents an attempt to counteract this tendency towards imprecision and loose-handedness in analyses of neoliberalism by doing two things. Firstly, it seeks to provide an overview of the dominant conceptualisations of neoliberalism in order to help interested observers better understand the uses to which the concept is put and, secondly, it identifies a number of problems with existing conceptualisations of neoliberalism in the hope of moving debates on neoliberalism forward. The first section of the article outlines the ideologistic, regulationist and Foucauldian governmentality conceptualisations of neoliberalism, while the second section considers three main problems with current debates on neoliberalism. These are: the failure to properly interrogate the relationship between the hegemonic and governmental politics of neoliberalism, which leads to an unhelpful conflation of neoliberalism with the myriad legitimation strategies that have been used to win popular support for the project; the prevalence of overly simplistic periodisations of neoliberalism; and, the failure to grasp the centrality of processes of subjectification to the functioning of neoliberalism, which is exemplified through a case study of the Open Public Services policy of the UK Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government between 2010-15.

The argument is put forward that, while it is not possible to formulate objective criteria which could be used to establish the correctness of any one approach to the study of neoliberalism given the grounding of different approaches in different ontological and epistemological viewpoints, we can adjudicate between approaches using the admittedly partial criteria of how well they manage to explain political phenomena, and to overcome problems and dead ends encountered by existing approaches (Bevir and Rhodes, 2003: 40). On this basis, this article also puts forward the argument that the heretofore somewhat marginalised governmentality perspective, premised on a Foucauldian understanding of power attuned to the link between micro- and macro-level techniques of power, offers the most untapped potential for new analytical insights due to its ability to avoid each of the problems mentioned above.

Existing approaches to the study of neoliberalism

Neoliberalism as hegemonic project

A common approach to the study of neoliberalism, particularly within the literature on British politics, has been to theorise it as an ideology or hegemonic project. This approach is most closely associated with Gramscian analyses of neoliberalism put forward by Stuart Hall (1979, 1985, 2003, 2011) and several other authors connected to the British 'new left' journal Soundings (see Clarke, 2009; Rustin, 2009, 2011; Massey, 2010, 2011), who view it as an ideology designed to reimpose forms of class domination attenuated by postwar Keynesian welfarism. Given their focus on the

class politics of neoliberalism, and the centrality of the base-superstructure model in their thinking, the ideologistic approach has affinities with the regulationist approaches discussed below. However, what is distinct about this approach is the emphasis it places on superstructural phenomena and its substantive research focus, which is on 'the media and politics as centres of ideological struggle' (Jessop *et al*, 1984).

According to Hall (2011: 10), the defining feature of neoliberalism as an ideology is an overriding concern with the possessive individual and a desire to roll back the frontiers of the state on the grounds that it is an enemy of freedom:

> The state must never govern society, dictate to free individuals how to dispose of their private property, regulate a free-market economy or interfere with the God-given right to make profits and amass personal wealth. State-led 'social engineering' must never prevail over corporate and private interests. It must not intervene in the 'natural' mechanisms of the free market.

Hall labelled the progenitor of British neoliberalism, Thatcherism, a form of 'authoritarian populism' which married a range of traditional Tory themes — 'nation, family, duty, authority, standards, traditionalism' (Hall, 1979: 18) — with the neo-liberal economics associated with figures such as Hayek and Friedman. The fact that Thatcherism was able to turn these abstract philosophies into an everyday 'common sense', such as by encouraging voters to think about issues of public spending using the model of the household budget, was one of the reasons why it was able to bring into alignment the interests of large sections of the British working class and the ruling class (Hall, 1979: 17).

Another reason was the way in which Thatcherism constructed for itself out of the ideological material at its disposal a series of enemies of the British people, such as the benefits 'scrounger', the mugger, the immigrant, the subversive and politically motivated teacher and 'loony left' Labour local councillors. In this relation, Hall focused his attention on the role of the popular press as 'ventriloquist voices' for Thatcherite ideology, in its battle to either win the hearts and minds of the British people, or to scare them over to the cause of Thatcherism with its hard-line rhetoric on law and order (Hall, 1979: 18).

In an updating of Hall's authoritarian populist account of neoliberalism, Bruff (2014) has argued that we have in recent years witnessed the rise of an 'authoritarian neoliberalism', with the project losing its 'hegemonic aura' as a consequence of the financial crisis, but also the longer-term rise in wealth and income inequality that has been a feature of neoliberalism from the outset. This authoritarian form of neoliberalism is deserving of its name, according to Bruff (2014: 115), because of its strenuous efforts to insulate neoliberal policy-making from democratic pressures through the introduction of new constitutional and legal rules which preclude public debate over certain policies, and because of increasingly punitive penal and crime policies designed to contain the fallout from the creation of an ever-growing number of losers in the game of neoliberal capitalism.

All of this is undergirded by a discourse of economic necessity in which the financial crisis has been discursively articulated as a case of 'when good capitalism goes bad.' Neoliberalism is not to be subjected to fundamental reform because the financial crisis was the not the fault of markets, but the fault of individuals who took on large amounts of credit card and mortgage debt, and nation-states whose inept regulatory oversight corrupted financial markets and whose lax control over the public finances led to ballooning public debt. As such, 'increased ethical responsibility by individuals' and an austere approach to the management of the public finances by nation-states are seen as the solution to the crisis (Bruff, 2014: 121).

Neoliberalism as mode of regulation

A second way of conceptualising neoliberalism, and one which has become dominant in recent years, is as a form of state or mode of regulation. Approaches of this kind are unified by a focus on

the class politics of neoliberal restructuring, state rescaling as part of neoliberal restructuring, economic policy-making under neoliberalism, and efforts on the part of state managers to deal with the negative externalities of neoliberal social and economic policies. Authors operating within this approach include Klein (2007), Crouch (2011), Dumenil and Levy (2012), Brenner *et al* (2010a, 2010b), Peck *et al* (2009, 2013) Peck (2010, 2011, 2013), Theodore and Peck (2012), and Ong (2006, 2007). However, geographer and anthropologist David Harvey's (2006) 'history of neoliberalism' is perhaps the paradigmatic example.

For Harvey, neoliberalism is about straightforwardly restoring the power of a ruling class whose material interests were threatened both by the rise of an organised and politically activist working class in the immediate postwar period and, more acutely, by the tumultuous economic circumstances of the 1970s. In this period savers were disadvantaged by negative real interest rates, highly skilled workers by punitive rates of taxation, and business owners and shareholders by paltry profits and dividends. Furthermore, Harvey (2006: 159) also points to evidence that neoliberalism has failed to produce promised increased rates of economic growth in all but a handful of special jurisdictional cases and for a limited period of time. This implies that if neoliberalism continues apace despite repeated failures, it can only be because it has enjoyed immense success in the one respect that counts, which is in funnelling wealth and power to the top.

Neoliberalism is for Harvey (2006: 160) a matter of 'accumulation by dispossession.' This is a process comprising four main dimensions: *privatisation and commodification*, designed to 'open up new fields for capital accumulation in domains hitherto regarded as off-limits to the calculus of profitability', such as utilities, public transport, education and healthcare; the opening up of new avenues for *financialized capital accumulation* amounting to so much 'speculation, predation, fraud and thievery'; the *management and manipulation of crises*, in particular in relation to the imposition of neoliberal reforms on countries by means of IMF structural adjustment programmes, which tend to channel wealth from poor to rich countries directly in the form of interest payments on government debt and indirectly in the form of the opening-up developing countries to internationally mobile capital; and *redistributions* within nation-states from the working to the upper class in the form of privatisations, reductions in spending on public services, and a reorientation of tax systems away from taxes on profits and towards taxes on income and spending.

In terms of explaining neoliberalism's resiliency as the dominant economic paradigm for nation-states, Harvey (2006: 156) points to two key factors. The first is the fleeting success of neoliberal reforms in terms of securing economic growth in a context of 'beggar-thy-neighbour' competition to attract internationally mobile capital between jurisdictions. The second, echoing Hall, is the waging of successful class warfare by the ruling class thanks largely to control of the media. In this respect, Harvey sees neoliberalism as a 'top down' process, not in the sense that it emanates from major international organisations and is imposed on nation-states, but in the sense that it has been consciously engineered by the economically dominant class to further their own interests. Indeed, as Harvey (2006: 117) sees it, what may sometimes seem like an imposition of neoliberalism on nation-states by international organisations is in actuality often merely a case of class forces internal to nation-states using such bodies as a pretext for imposing neoliberal reforms that they desire, but which would otherwise be difficult to justify.

This view of neoliberalism as something imposed on nation-states from above by a small economic elite is a major problem with Harvey's analysis, and with many other regulationist analyses of neoliberalism. However, it is not a necessary feature of the regulationist approach because other exponents of this approach, such as Peck (2010), have been able to put forward more convincing and less conspiratorial account of the spread of neoliberalism. Peck is considerably more circumspect than Harvey (and, for that matter, Hall) when it comes to discussions of the class politics of neoliberalism, preferring instead to stress the inescapably hybrid nature of actually existing neoliberalism and that it is better conceived of as an open-ended process rather than an end-state. From Peck's (2010: 6) point of view, cases in which neoliberalism has been imposed on states from the top down — such as in post-invasion Iraq and Eastern Europe after the fall of communism — are the exception rather than the rule and it is more often the case that

neoliberalism is embedded by means of a 'dialogic' process with whatever is the prevailing political culture in a particular geographic locale. Peck (2010: xii) describes his approach thusly:

> This is not... a broad-brush account of neoliberalism as a global regulatory architecture, imposed from above, or as a metaphor for the ideological air that we all (must) breathe. Neither does it invoke neoliberalism as a summary label, to be applied to particular politicians, policy techniques, or parts of the world. Rather, it is a story of the never-inevitable ascendancy of neoliberalization, as an open-ended and contradictory process of politically assisted market rule... The concern here is not merely to reiterate the big picture (or big N) story of neoliberalism, in broad political-economic strokes, nor to propose some contingent or "bottom up" alternative, but to elaborate an explanation complementary to more structural accounts, one that keep agents and agency in sight.

In order to emphasise that, even in its North American and West European 'heartlands', neoliberalism does not unfold according to a blueprint which is the same everywhere, Peck (2010: xiii) stresses that neoliberalism is a process and that, for this reason, it is better to describe it as neoliberalization rather than neoliberalism. For Peck, there is no privileged generative site of neoliberalism, whether that be: the upper class, as in Harvey's formulation; major international organisations, as in accounts focused on the instrumentality of the 'Washington Consensus'; or 'microlevel' neoliberalization processes, as in the 'small-n' account of neoliberalism put forward by Ong (2007). Rather, neoliberalization processes emanate from a multiplicity of sites, one of which may be dominant in one instant or geographical context, and another the next.

[Table 1 here]

Neoliberalism as governmental rationality

A third way of conceptualising neoliberalism, and one which is employed productively by authors such as Rose (1996, 1999a, 1999b, 2000), Rose & Miller (2008), Dean (1995, 1996, 2010), Burchell (1996), O'Malley (1996), Larner (2000), Ferguson (2009) and Foster *et al* (2014) is rooted in Michel Foucault's poststructuralist studies of 'governmentality'. The term is a synthesis of the French words, *gouverner* and *mentalité* – 'governing' and 'mode of thought' – and can be roughly translated into English as meaning 'governmental rationality' (Gordon, 1991: 1). This is suggestive of the defining feature of the Foucauldian approach to the study of government, which is its concern with the extensive nature of governmental power. Foucault (1994: 341) subscribes to a much broader understanding of government than is common today, which was prevalent in the sixteenth century, and which he describes in the following terms:

> [Government] designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed: the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick. It covered not only legitimately constituted forms of political or economic subjection but also modes of action, more or less considered and calculated, that were destined to act upon the possibilities of action of other people. To govern in this sense is to structure the possible field of action of others (Foucault, 1994: 341).

As such, for Foucault, government encompasses not only the traditional sphere of government linked to state institutions, but also the government of others beyond the state, such as at the level of 'community', and the government of the self. However, Foucault acknowledges that government is not static and he also describes governmentality as a specific configuration of power brought into being in the mid-eighteenth century which has three defining features: firstly, it takes the 'population' as its target, aiming to produce a happy and well-ordered society of workers and consumers; secondly, it provides a means to this end in the form of 'apparatuses of security', which involve the inscription of a range of security problems affecting individuals, groups and the nation onto the state; and thirdly, it takes 'political economy' as a guide for action, with the result that '[t]o govern a state will therefore mean… to set up an economy at the level of the entire state… exercising towards its inhabitants, and the wealth and behaviour of each and all, a form of

surveillance and control as attentive as that of the head of a family over his household and his goods' (Foucault, 1991: 92).

Where neoliberalism fits into this discussion is as a particular variant of governmentality and one which first problematised and then replaced the 'social liberal' variant which was dominant in the immediate post-war period. Social liberalism – which was itself a problematisation of earlier liberal forms of government – was premised on the government of 'society'. It sought to tackle a range of problems produced or left neglected by earlier forms of liberal government including poverty, poor housing conditions, inadequate health care for large swathes of the population, a lack of economic productivity on the part of the uneducated poor, persistent pockets of criminality in the major urban centres, and moral breakdown throughout society (Dean, 2010: 66). In particular, it sought to deal with the 'social question' of how to deal with the potential for social unrest given high levels of inequality and poverty in a context of ostensible civil and political equality. It sought to do this by means of the 'welfare state', considered less as a unified institutional edifice and more as 'the telos… of particular problematizations, interventions, institutions and practices concerning unemployment, old age, disability, sickness, public education and housing, health administration, and the norms of family life and childrearing' (Dean, 2010: 68).

By the late-1970s the critiques of prominent public intellectuals and social commentators such as those associated with the Mont Pelerin Society had congealed into a 'politically salient assault on the welfare state in Britain, Europe and the United States'. This was centred around the notions that it was unsustainable from a financial standpoint, illiberal from the perspective of the rights of the individual, and enervating of the moral fibre of those 'on the social' (Rose, 1996: 51). This was the milieu in which a new form of government — neoliberalism — comprising a diverse array of concepts, themes, theories, technologies of government and objects to be governed was brought into being. However, neoliberalism was not straightforwardly a reprise of classical liberalism. In Foucault's (2008: 131) own words,

> neo-liberalism is not Adam Smith... the problem of neo-liberalism [is] not how to cut out or contrive a free space of the market within an already given political society... The problem of neo-liberalism is rather how the overall exercise of political power can be modelled on the principles of a market power.

This means that, whereas in the era of classical liberalism the market was an autonomous, self-regulating sphere which good government ought to respect and keep a safe distance from, in the era of neoliberalism (and especially in Anglo-American forms of neoliberalism) the market becomes the principle upon which the whole rest of society is remodelled: 'Government... has to intervene on society so that competitive mechanisms can play a regulatory role at every moment and every point in society and by intervening in this way its objective will become possible, that is to say, a general regulation of society by the market' (Foucault, 2008: 145). Similarly, neoliberalism (and German Ordoliberalism in particular) grants the state a legitimate role in fostering the moral and cultural values, as well as the legal framework, appropriate to this new kind of market order (Lemke, 2001: 196). What this implies is that, from the perspective of the neoliberals, the state should no longer refuse to intervene in society for fear of disturbing the beneficent workings of the free market, but should instead take on a substantial regulatory role in relation to that which it governs and oversees. Indeed, in Foucault's own words, 'neo-liberal governmental intervention is no less dense, frequent, active, and continuous than in any other system,' including the system of post-war social liberalism that it succeeded (Foucault, 2008: 145).

New avenues in researching neoliberalism

The 'ethos' of neoliberalism: Governmentality and hegemony

A major flaw in the existing literature on neoliberalism is the failure to properly theorise the relationship between the hegemonic and governmental politics of neoliberalism, which makes it difficult for authors to differentiate between neoliberalism proper and the various legitimation

strategies that have been used as a basis for securing the project's popular support. Peck (2010: 20), one of the few authors who has broached this issue, asserts that neoliberalism occupies 'the ideological space defined by a (broadly) sympathetic critique of nineteenth-century laissez-faire and deep antipathies to collectivist, planned and socialized modes of government.' However, this is a more contentious assertion than Peck supposes if we consider the degree of discontinuity in the history of the hegemonic politics of neoliberalism. This is amply demonstrated by looking at the history of British neoliberalism and comparing the initial Thatcherite variant with its New Labour successor. The basic contours of the Thatcherite hegemonic project described above in the discussion of Stuart Hall's analysis of neoliberalism — it's divisive and exclusionary nature, its reliance on the production of a range of symptomal figures in order to sustain itself, and its fetishising of monetarism as a cure-all for the predicament Britain found itself in in the late 1970s — stand in stark contrast to those of the New Labour project, despite widespread continuity in terms of the governmental politics of neoliberalism in the two eras.

A useful way of shedding light on the essential difference between the hegemonic politics of Thatcherism and New Labour is provided by Dyrberg (2009: 137), who argues that the way in which we experience space – in terms of concepts such as up/down, left/right, close/far, and front/behind – in many cases provides the discursive raw materials for our understanding of the social world. Thanks to certain inescapable biological and physical constants throughout human experience these concepts occupy a privileged place in our mental apparatus and, as a result of their utility in navigating the physical world, they are often metaphorised to help explain social and political phenomena. When it comes to differentiating between Thatcherism and New Labour, the latter can be seen as a turning point in which a left/right orientational metaphor was displaced by a new kind of political discourse structured around a front/back orientational metaphor. In other words, whereas Thatcherism generated political capital by constructing a series of enemies of the British people – from the miners to 'irresponsible' trade unionists, Labour party militants and Irish republican terrorists – and drew parallels between these as part of a broad left-wing assault on the British people, New Labour's approach to government was a politics almost without adversary, which unified left and right using the empty signifier 'modernisation' (de Vos, 2005: 204).

The basic narrative put forward by New Labour was that we are living through a period of epochal change that we are unable to resist or even direct, and which manifests itself in such things as the emergence of a 'new global economy', fundamental changes to the class structure of industrial societies, de-traditionalisation and individualisation (Dyrberg, 2009: 149). Furthermore, these social trends – which were treated almost as a force of nature in New Labour discourse – were seen to necessitate a response on the part of the state in terms of simple adaptation to the 'realities' of globalisation (which in the first instance requires a more 'reflexive' approach to policy formation) and on the part of individuals in terms of a willingness to embrace risk and uncertainty. It was asserted that we now live in a 'post-industrial' society which lacks the class and institutional infrastructure necessary to accommodate a politics of left and right, and from the perspective of the sociological analysis underlying the New Labour project, de-traditionalisation and the pervasive scepticism it engenders meant that the types of ideologies associated with leftist social movements of the past had become forms of political fundamentalism (Leggett, 2005: 16). In echoing traditional socialist and Marxist ways of conceptualising ideology as mere epiphenomena, what matters for New Labour is 'what works', and although traditional social democratic 'values' can be held onto, this is only if we accept there can be 'no veto on means' in terms of how those values are translated into policy (Dyrberg, 2009: 145).

This reorientation of political discourse by New Labour away from the left/right and towards the front/back orientational metaphor involved a displacement of old ideological dividing lines through the notion of 'the forces of conservatism', which in Blairite discourse consisted mainly of 'old Left' (that is, the 'traditional' social democratic politics of the Labour party in the immediate post-war period) and 'new Right' (that is, Thatcherism) (Leggett, 2005: 17). These two political forces – 'old Left' and 'new Right' – were seen as two sides of the same coin: although apparently very different to one another, and despite the fact that they were one another's chief antagonist from the late 1970s up until the emergence of New Labour in the mid-1990s, they are the same in the sense that they are both rooted in an outdated and inflexible ideology. Furthermore, New Labour

counterposed itself to old Left and new Right by framing itself as a modernising force in British politics, with Blair himself – the 'dynamic' young leader – acting as moderniser-in-chief (Dyrberg, 2009: 134). In this way, New Labour reconfigured and recombined left and right – reconfigured in the sense that being 'on the left' and being progressive was equated with embracing the new reality of globalisation in the specific ways advocated by Blair *et al*, and recombined in the sense that becoming part of this new progressive agenda involved combining elements of what would once have been considered either 'the left' or 'the right' (Leggett, 2005: 17).

This was manifested in a wide range of policy changes and in a diverse array of ideological transformations. Within New Labour's worldview, there no longer existed any antagonism between low taxes and high quality public services. In fact, the latter presupposed the former because low taxes were crucial in building the 'economic dynamism' that could deliver a higher overall tax take for the government, and because in a context of highly internationally mobile capital higher rates of tax are an invitation for corporations to look elsewhere to do business (Blair and Schroeder, 1999). In a similar vein, there was no longer seen to be any antagonism between, on the one hand, the existence of free markets and economic dynamism and, on the other, social justice, given that New Labour was proposing a 'Third Way in which government works in partnership with business to boost enterprise, education and employability' (Blair, 1998). From this perspective there was no room for notions of social justice as encompassing fundamental beliefs in equality and solidarity and it was instead understood in terms of equipping people with the skills necessary in order to form a functional part of the 'knowledge economy'. In other words, government's role in securing social justice became limited to ensuring that citizens do not suffer the injustice of being 'excluded' from the labour market. Likewise, any antagonism between a prosperous free market economy and the existence of the welfare state ceased to exist in the eyes of New Labour thanks to the notion of 'welfare to work', which envisioned a continuing role for the welfare state as guarantor of 'opportunity and security in a changing world', and something which could play a part in boosting the 'employability' of those in receipt of unemployment benefits (Blair, 1994).

Clearly this represented a more significant departure from the hegemonic politics of Thatcherism than is implied in Hall's (2003) description of New Labour discourse as 'double-speak'. It also suggests that Peck's assertion that neoliberalism's 'ideological space' consists of sympathy for *laissez-faire* and antipathy towards collectivism is somewhat off-the-mark. Narrowing down the hegemonic politics of neoliberalism in this way is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, it makes it difficult to explain the spread of neoliberalism, given that the legitimation strategies which have been used to propagate neoliberalism in different spatio-temporal contexts are myriad and, secondly, it discounts the possibility of an 'anti-market' variant of neoliberalism. Indeed, just as there are instances of 'progressive' social movements which have been legitimated using the rhetoric of neoliberalism, such as South Africa's 'Basic Income Guarantee', which was advocated by South African trade unions, church groups and NGOs as a way of minimising bureaucracy, tackling welfare dependency and 'investing in human capital' (Ferguson, 2009), a variant of neoliberalism legitimated using 'progressive' rhetoric is also conceivable.

Roll-out, reflexive or 'zombie' neoliberalism? The problem of periodisation

A second problem with the existing literature on neoliberalism relates to periodisation. Most accounts of neoliberalism fail to periodise it properly, and those that do tend to be overly focused on the supposed impending collapse of neoliberalism. Of the existing periodisations of neoliberalism, perhaps the one with the most enduring influence is Peck and Tickell's (2002), premised on the distinction between 'roll-back' and 'roll-out' neoliberalism. Within this schema, the first generation of neoliberal politicians — principally Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the US — busied themselves with the task of dismantling parts of the Keynesian welfare state in order to set the stage for a more thorough-going neoliberalisation down the line, carried out by centre left politicians such as Blair and Clinton with less ideological baggage than the aforementioned right-wingers. They describe the initial roll-back phase of neoliberalism in terms of:

a shift from the philosophical project of the early 1970s (when the primary focus was on the restoration of a form of free-market thinking within the economics profession and its subsequent [re]constitution as the theoretical high ground) to the era of neoliberal conviction politics during the 1980s (when state power was mobilized behind marketization and deregulation projects, aimed particularly at the central institutions of the Keynesian-welfarist settlement) (Peck and Tickell, 2002: 389).

'Roll-out' neoliberalism, meanwhile, they associate with key transformations in the heartlands of neoliberalism around the turn of the century to do with the activation of the 'state-building' moment within neoliberalism. This implied a recognition on the part of the governing elite that 'the perverse economic consequences and pronounced social externalities of narrowly market-centric forms of neoliberalism' were unsustainable and could only be remedied with a more active approach to policy-making, encompassing a range of highly interventionist economic and social policies geared towards 'extending and bolstering market logics, socializing individual subjects, and disciplining the noncompliant' (Peck and Tickell, 2002: 389).

This periodisation has subsequently been refined by Brenner *et al* (2010a), who prefer the terms 'disarticulated' and 'deepening neoliberalization' and seek to draw attention to the gradual nature of neoliberalization processes along three main 'dimensions of regulatory restructuring.' These are: context-specific forms of regulatory intervention; systems of inter-jurisdictional policy transfer; and rule regimes and 'parameterization' processes. For these authors, disarticulated neoliberalism involved processes of 'place-, territory- and scale-specific' neoliberalisation taking place in a still largely hostile 'geo-economic' environment geared towards 'late Keynesian' modes of economic management. During this phase there was a widening of the international neoliberal 'thought collective' and a degree of policy transfer between nation-states in the vanguard of the neoliberal revolution (such as the USA and Chile). However, this was minimal and key international organisations such as the IMF, the World Bank and the OECD continued to apply neo-Keynesian solutions to the problems besieging the world economy. Subsequently, throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s a number of important new trends became evident, including the increasing 'transnationalization, mutual recursion, programmatic integration, and co-evolution' of policy networks engaging in the first round of neoliberal restructuring in the form of monetarism, privatisation, marketisation and managerial reform of the public sector in response to the failure of neo-Keynesian solutions to the problems of the world economy. In the era of deep neoliberalization 'macrospatial institutional frameworks' have been colonised by neoliberal parameters meaning that, regardless of the ideological character of specific forms of regulatory experimentation, they have increasingly come to be inflected by neoliberal 'rules of the game' (Brenner *et al*, 2010a: 337).

Unsurprisingly, in recent years the financial crisis has come to hold sway over periodisations of neoliberalism. Various new left authors have interpreted the financial crisis as the death knell of neoliberalism. Rustin (2011; see also Hall, 2011 and Clarke, 2009), for example, sees the present conjuncture as a moment of 'systemic crisis': the neoliberal economic model based on large cuts to public spending, deregulation, privatisation and tax cuts for 'wealth creators' first employed by Reagan and Thatcher in the 1980s has failed. This is demonstrated most clearly by the financial crisis, but also by stagnant real incomes for the majority of people and massive, and growing, inequality throughout society. For Rustin, one of the distinctive features of the crisis of neoliberalism is that it has not played-out in a class-based manner due to the 'demobilisation of class resistances to capital, and the successful co-option of the political parties originally set up to represent working-class interests to the task of co-managing the marketised social and economic model.' This has meant that rather than seeing the '*explosion* of conflicting social forces' we are witnessing the '*implosion* of a largely unchallenged political and economic system' (Rustin, 2011: 33).

Peck *et al* (2009: 105), meanwhile, have a subtly different reading of the implications of the financial crisis for neoliberalism, arguing that it heralds not its imminent collapse, but the emergence of a 'zombie' neoliberalism:

If one were to represent the strategic core of the [neoliberal] project in terms of the state-assisted mobilization of financialized forms of accumulation, coupled with a rolling program of regressive class redistribution and social repression, then the current crisis looks more like a qualitative transformation than a terminal event or reversal. Neoliberalism's intellectual project may be practically dead, but, as a mode of crisis-driven governance, it could be entering its zombie phase… animated by technocratic forms of muscle memory, deep instincts of self-preservation, and spasmodic bursts of social violence.

For Peck *et al,* the hybrid nature of neoliberalism in specific national contexts means that the onset of crisis will be felt unevenly, as some neoliberalised states find themselves better able to cope with particular aspects of the crisis than others, while some may even be able to stave it off indefinitely.

Without seeking to discount the valuable insights contained in some of these periodisations of neoliberalism, the problem with them is that they tend to obscure some important and often sizeable changes within neoliberalism *not* produced by such exogenous shocks as the financial crisis or the hegemonic victory of the project. In particular, although both Peck and Tickell's (2002) rollout—rollback, and Brenner *et al*'s (2010a) disarticulated—deepening, formulations are highly useful heuristic devices, they nevertheless represent an over-simplification of the history of neoliberalism. To illustrate this point, Dean (2010: 223) has identified the emergence within advanced liberal societies of what he terms 'reflexive government'. This is a process involving a shift from the 'governmentalization of the state' — whereby 'the state came to take on the function of the care of populations and individuals' — to the 'governmentalization of government', in which the attention of government was turned back onto itself and the aim of more 'efficient, accountable, transparent and democratic' government was achieved by means of the deployment of a range of technologies of both performance and agency. How can such notions be incorporated into periodisations of neoliberalism in order to provide accounts of the history of the project not beholden to simplistic narratives fixated on either the 'roll-out' of neoliberalism or exogenous shocks to neoliberalised social formations?

Neoliberal subjectification: 'Citizen consumers' and 'citizen co-producers'

Subjectification — the process through which political objectives are achieved through the constitution of subjects such that 'practices of government' come to depend on 'practices of the self' (Dean, 1995: 563) — is integral to the way that neoliberalism functions. However, this falls outside the scope of most analyses of neoliberalism or, at best, tends only to be considered tangentially.

The centrality of subjectification to the functioning of neoliberalism can be demonstrated by looking at the so-called 'Open Public Services' agenda of the UK Conservative-Liberal Democrat government between 2010-2015, which was part of its broader 'Big Society' approach to the provision of public services involving engaging more with 'third sector' providers (Nicholls and Teasdale, forthcoming). According to Linders (2012), the dominant public administration paradigm had, up until recently, been the New Public Management (NPM), geared towards imposing stricter managerial control in the public sector and emulating in the public sector the supposedly beneficial arrangements existing between consumers and producers in the private sector. The NPM formed the basis of New Labour's own reforms to the public services, which went a long way towards realising the NPM goal of creating citizen-consumers by drastically expanding the range of 'choice' available to the users of public services. However, according to Linders (2012: 453), the NPM paradigm has been destabilised by the emergence of new discourses of citizenship which view the citizen as a 'co-producer' of public services.

Linders identifies three main types of 'citizen co-production' operational in the formulation, delivery and monitoring of government policy in contemporary society. The first of these is 'citizen-sourcing', in which resources held by the public are mobilised in order to make government more efficient, or to help the government achieve a specified policy objective. Citizen-sourcing can be a

feature of any stage in the policy-making process, from 'ideation' and service design (such as in the case of 'e-petitions') right through to service monitoring (such as when governments open-up new channels of communication with users of public services in order to identify instances of poor quality provision and to devise solutions) (Linders, 2012: 448). The second type of citizen co-production identified by Linders (2012: 447) is 'government as platform', which involves government providing resources – typically of the information and communications technology kind – that can help citizens better govern themselves and others. Meanwhile, the third kind of citizen co-production is what Linders (2012: 447) has termed 'Do It Yourself government', which refers to any kind of ostensibly 'public' service provided on a 'citizen-to-citizen' basis, and in which government plays at most a 'facilitating' role.

Judging from the Open Public Services white paper and the supplementary Open Data white paper, sourcing new policies and new ways of making existing policies work better from citizens is now a preoccupation of British government. An example of this is the 'Red Tape Challenge' , which is described as a mechanism designed to 'free up business and society from the burden of excessive regulation' that works by encouraging businesses, civil society groups and members of the public to submit their thoughts on which regulations affecting them in their daily lives should be removed, before they are collated and subjected to analysis by the relevant government departments, which then attempt to decide which instances of deregulation would be both desirable and feasible. After this, proposals put forward by government departments are subjected to internal challenge by the Red Tape Challenge Team and external challenge by 'sector champions' and other concerned stakeholders, before being passed on to a Ministerial 'Star Chamber' for final adjudication, with the presumption being that all 'burdensome regulations will go unless they can be strongly justified' (Cabinet Office, 2014).

The coalition government has also sought to apply these principles to the public sector, with attempts being made to 'citizen-source' ideas from public sector workers as to how to improve 'service delivery' within the sector. Two initiatives that are particularly significant in this regard are the Tell Us How challenge and the Tell Us How 'Better Use of Data' challenge. The Tell Us How challenge is geared towards improving public services by capitalising on the insights of those at the frontline of public service delivery. In the words of the Open Data White Paper: 'Tell Us How is based on the idea that those people working hard to deliver public services every day are best placed to provide invaluable insights into innovative ways to improve how we can better design and deliver those services' (Cabinet Office, 2012: 42). The Tell Us How 'Better Use of Data' challenge functions in much the same way, but is oriented specifically towards soliciting ideas relating to the potential uses to which open data can be put within the public sector, such as in relation to enabling 'joined-up government' in order to improve user experience of public services and to combat fraud and error (Cabinet Office, 2012: 38).

The second form of citizen co-production identified by Linders – 'government-as-platform' – has become just as ubiquitous within reforms to British central government. Take, for example, the new data.gov.uk website which aims to apply downward pressure on public spending by furnishing citizens – discursively articulated by the coalition government as 'armchair auditors' – with the information they need in order to be able to identify any wasteful instances of government spending, and to hold their elected representatives to account accordingly. The thinking behind data.gov.uk in this respect is neatly illustrated in the following quote, taken from the video introduction to the site by David Cameron:

> It is our ambition to be one of the most transparent governments in the world. Open about what we do and, crucially, about what we spend… Each government department will publish every item of spending over £25,000 online. Just think about what this could mean. People will be able to look at millions of items of government spending, flagging up waste when they see it, and that scrutiny is going to act as a powerful straitjacket on spending, saving us a lot of money (data.gov.uk).

The range of information data.gov.uk holds is broad and includes not only, as Cameron mentions, information on all items of departmental spending over £25,000, but also all items of local authority

spending over £500 and information on the salaries of public sector workers. This can be expected to lead to reductions in public spending whether or not members of the public prove willing to play the role of 'armchair auditors' for the simple reason that the fact this information is available means that those in charge of spending in the public sector will have to assume that they are being audited in this way. Furthermore, the availability of this information, alongside other reforms designed to make it easier for private and third sector providers to bid to take over select public services as part of increasing 'choice' for public service users, will also exert downward pressure on public spending thanks to the inevitable attempts of private and third sector providers to undercut public sector providers and private and third sector providers already in receipt of government contracts (Cabinet Office, 2011: 36).

In relation to the third kind of citizen co-production identified by Linders – 'Do It Yourself government' – the 'community ownership' strand of the OPS agenda is particularly significant given its ambition to devolve power to the lowest level possible. Ideally this means giving power to individuals so that they can enjoy maximum freedom of choice possible in their interactions with public services. However, where this is not possible, the objective is to devolve power to local communities, which means giving local people 'direct control over neighbourhood services, either by transferring the ownership of those services directly to communities, or by giving neighbourhood groups democratic control over them' (Cabinet Office, 2011: 26).

In order to enable this, a range of new rights have been granted to local people. These include the *Community Right to Buy*, which gives local authorities the power to list public and private land and buildings as 'assets of community value', enabling local people 'to have a fair chance to bid to take over land and buildings that are important to them'; transforming community assets, which involves the transfer of local authority assets to community management or ownership; *Community Right to Build*, which gives community groups the right to develop land for the purposes of community services without the need for a formal planning application; the *Community Right to Challenge*, which gives community groups the right to bid to provide local authority services themselves; and notice of funding changes, designed to ensure that local authorities give communities ample notice when it intends to 'reduce or end funding or other support to a voluntary and community organisation' so that they are able to make alternative arrangements for the continued provision of those services (Cabinet Office, 2011: 26). Using these new rights, local people will be able to take over and run a range of services at the local level, including not only such 'public' services as community centres, childcare facilities and libraries, but also private services of special public interest, such as shops, post offices and pubs (Cabinet Office, 2011: 26).

While several authors who have analysed neoliberalism as a hegemonic project have considered subjectification, they have mainly been concerned with the role of subjectification in producing subjects willing to vote for neoliberal policies and politicians. Meanwhile, authors who view neoliberalism as a mode of regulation have tended to overlook the importance of subjectification altogether, preferring instead to focus on broader neoliberalising processes operating at the level of states and international organisations. The above analysis of the OPS agenda of the British Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government — which takes in subjectification, the granting of new rights, and the withdrawal of the state to the role of facilitator of beneficent 'citizen-to-citizen' interactions — demonstrates the utility of a governmentality approach to the study of neoliberalism focused on how the project works from the point of view of those subjected to it. This is especially the case for those interested in the linkages between micro and macro-level politics, or the dialectical relationship between policies such as those forming the OPS agenda and the broader rationalities according to which liberal democratic societies are ruled.

Conclusion

Academic writing on neoliberalism in recent years has been characterised by a dawning awareness that the financial crisis has not spelled the end of neoliberalism and a grudging appreciation of neoliberalism's ability to overcome crises. For this reason, neoliberalism is likely to continue preoccupy academic commentators in diverse fields of academic enquiry and it follows

that if the resulting discussions of neoliberalism are to be as productive as possible, a clearer understanding of precisely what the project *is* will be necessary. This article has contributed to achieving this goal by outlining three main conceptualisations of neoliberalism: as a hegemonic project, a mode of regulation and a governmental rationality. It has also sought to show how the heretofore somewhat neglected governmentality perspective has the potential to produce new analytical insights by using it to highlight three problems with existing accounts of neoliberalism: their tendency to hypostatise a coherent neoliberal 'hegemonic project' despite the fact that the history of the hegemonic politics of neoliberalism is one not of continuity and similarity, but of discontinuity and heterogeneity; their tendency to proffer inadequate periodisations of neoliberalism, preoccupied with either the supposed imminent collapse of neoliberalism or its flexibility in being able to forestall that collapse; and, their neglect of the importance of processes of subjectification to neoliberalisms of various geographical and political stripes. In highlighting these problems, this article does not seek to 'close the book' on neoliberalism, but rather to open up productive new avenues of research in this important of field of enquiry.

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