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Série Seminário Internacional "Pesquisa  
Urbana e Políticas Urbanas na Europa  
dos Anos 80" - Convênio IEI/PNUD

UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT AND SPATIAL  
DIVISION OF LABOUR: THE BRITISH  
EXPERIENCE

Doreen Massey

Outubro/1989

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SÉRIE SEMINÁRIO INTERNACIONAL "PESQUISA URBANA E POLÍTICAS  
URBANAS NA EUROPA DOS ANOS 80"

#### APRESENTAÇÃO

Em Dezembro de 1987 se realizou no Rio de Janeiro o semi-  
nário internacional "Pesquisa Urbana e Políticas Urbanas  
na Europa dos Anos 80". Tal seminário foi organizado pelo  
Instituto de Economia Industrial (IEI) em colaboração com  
o Development Planning Unit (DPU) da University College,  
London e o Instituto Brasileiro de Administração Municipal  
(IBAM) e teve lugar no quadro das atividades de seu grupo  
de pesquisa em políticas urbanas. Contou com o patrocínio  
do Programa para o Desenvolvimento das Nações Unidas (P-  
NUD) e da Financiadora de Estudos e Projetos (FINEP) e com  
a colaboração científica do Instituto de Pesquisa em Pla-  
nejamento Urbano e Regional (IPPUR) e do Instituto Univer-  
sitário de Pesquisa do Rio de Janeiro (IUPERJ).

O seminário teve como objetivos: (1) apresentar e avaliar  
algumas das contribuições teóricas da pesquisa urbana eu-  
ropéia atual para a análise dos processos de desenvolvi-  
mento urbano e das políticas urbanas; (2) proporcionar  
elementos para uma análise comparativa das políticas urba-  
nas em países desenvolvidos e em vias de desenvolvimento,  
com particular ênfase no caso brasileiro e (3) apresentar  
alguns exemplos de experiências atuais de políticas urba-  
nas e de planejamento urbano na Europa que fossem relevan-  
tes para o debate em curso sobre o futuro das estratégias  
e políticas urbanas no Brasil.

As pesquisas e teorias urbanas desenvolvidas na Europa na  
década de 70, particularmente na França, tiveram um grande  
impacto nos círculos acadêmicos tanto dos países desenvol-  
vidos como do Terceiro Mundo. A pesquisa urbana no Brasil,  
por exemplo, foi profundamente influenciada pelas perspec-  
tivas teóricas da chamada escola francesa de sociologia

urbana, a qual marcou uma ruptura com as teorias urbanas funcionalistas ao salientar as contradições do processo de urbanização e o papel da intervenção do Estado e das políticas urbanas no desenvolvimento das sociedades capitalistas.

Estas contribuições críticas à uma teoria geral da urbanização capitalista foram objeto de intenso e contínuo debate, mas é talvez no contexto das profundas transformações econômicas e políticas da última década na Europa e das novas formas de articulação entre a sociedade civil e o Estado, que suas limitações se fizeram mais evidentes. Em verdade, o que muitos autores se referem como a crise da pesquisa urbana européia - sobretudo a de seu núcleo mais dinâmico e coerente, a escola francesa - não parece estar disvinculada da própria crise do que era seu objeto privilegiado de análise: o Estado de bem-estar.

Uma década mais tarde, na Europa dos anos 80, se a pesquisa urbana crítica ainda mostra certa continuidade com a da década passada, ela também apresenta profundas rupturas. Ao mesmo tempo ela se faz mais atomizada e diversificada - na própria lógica da fragmentação interior de seu objeto de estudo. Nosso propósito foi justamente explorar estas descontinuidades e rupturas e discutir - sem pretensões de nenhuma visão compreensiva - alguns dos novos caminhos que esta pesquisa hoje percorre e as potenciais contribuições teóricas que ela possa dar para a pesquisa e a análise urbana em outros contextos. Para isso contamos com a presença de alguns dos mais destacados acadêmicos europeus trabalhando nesta área, os que, na sua maioria, tiveram um papel também importante na década passada.

Em relação às experiências de planejamento urbano, nos concentramos em dois dos casos mais inovadores dos últimos anos na Europa: os de Madrid e de Barcelona. Ao mesmo tempo, trata-se de casos com interessantes paralelos com a

situação brasileira, proporcionando assim um importante contraponto para o debate sobre os desafios da política urbana no Brasil de hoje. Para a apresentação destes casos contamos com a presença das pessoas diretamente responsáveis pela formulação e implementação dos planos e políticas urbanas das duas cidades referidas.

Incluimos aqui lista dos participantes europeus do seminário, cujos papers apresentados pretendemos ir publicando na língua original nesta série de textos para discussão:

- |                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| MICHAEL BALL       | - Economista, Birbeck College, Londres   |
| JORDI BORJA        | - Sociólogo, Vice-Prefeito de Barcelona  |
| JUAN BUSQUETS      | - Arquiteto, Diretor de Planejamento Urbano da cidade de Barcelona                                       |
| ELIZABETH LEBAS    | - Socióloga, DPU e Architectural Association Graduate School, Londres                                    |
| EDUARDO LEIRA      | - Urbanista, ex-Diretor do Plano Diretor de Madrid   |
| EDUARDO MANGADA    | - Arquiteto, Secretário de Política Territorial do Governo Regional de Madrid                            |
| DOREEN MASSEY      | - Geógrafa, Open University, Milton Keynes   |
| GIORGIO PICCINATO  | - Arquiteto, Diretor do Departamento de Planejamento do Instituto de Urbanismo da Universidade de Veneza |
| EDMOND PRETECEILLE | - Sociólogo, Diretor do Centro de Sociologia Urbana de Paris   |

JORDI SOLETURA

- Advogado, Responsável pelo Projeto  
de Autonomia Regional na Espanha

### A Bit of History

I must begin this discussion of recent theoretical developments with a bit of history, because the intellectual changes which I am going to discuss have taken place in a context of much wider shifts within society as a whole. Since around the mid 1960s the United Kingdom has experienced truly structural changes in the nature and organisation of its economy, in its place within the international division of labour, and in the wider geography of society as a whole. These changes have taken place alongside the theoretical debates which are discussed below. I would not want to imply that there is a deterministic relation involved here between changes in society and theoretical debate, but there have certainly been interesting links.

The changes in the economy have been contributed to by a number of distinct, though inter-related, processes. Perhaps first and most marked among them has been the process of de-industrialisation, which in this context I shall take simply to mean the absolute loss of manufacturing employment. This was a process that began in the mid 1960s (1966 to be precise) but which has continued at an uneven and irregular pace ever since. The sharpest collapse occurred in the 1980s, when the monetarist strategy of the newly elected central government coincided temporarily with a recession at the level of the international economy. The effect on manufacturing industry was dramatic. Moreover that effect had a very specific geography. The industrialisation hit cities first, and in particular to begin with inner cities, and then spread out to encompass whole regions of the country. The north west and the west midlands became paradigmatic cases of deindustrialised regions. But for at least some part of this period since the mid 1960s another process, often seen as being in part compensatory, has been underway. This is the process of geographical decentralisation of jobs, from the erstwhile central and relatively prosperous parts of the country (the west midlands and the south east) to the less urban and more peripheral parts of the UK. It was a process that was particularly marked in the 1960s and 1970s, although it continues today in a different form. One of the things which is clear, and now generally recognised, is that this decentralisation was a decentralisation above all of branch plants. It involved the separation in space of production from control, of execution from conceptualisation. This was particularly true because it occurred at the same time as a notable increase in the degree of concentration of the ownership of capital. In retrospect this process of decentralisation can be seen as a way in which British capital actively made use of uneven development within the UK. Pressurised by increasing competition from abroad, industry based within Britain

set out to find cheaper, more vulnerable labour. And it found it, or for a while thought it had found it, in the peripheral regions of the country.

But there have also been points of active growth within the UK economy. Let me just mention two of them here. First of all the period has witnessed the emergence of new manufacturing sectors. The most obvious case is the growth in importance of the electronics industry. The expansion of this sector, however, and in particular of the high technology and research orientated parts of it, has been concentrated primarily in the already relatively prosperous south eastern parts of the country. The debate over why this is so is long and complex, but it does seem clear that it is a result at least in part of state sponsored investment in research, which is concentrated in those regions, and of the social power which high technology workers in these sectors are able to exercise within the labour market. This social power enables these workers to have a high degree of influence over the location of employment. Whatever the reasons in detail for this emerging geography of high technology sectors, what is clear is that there is a deep irony involved here: that what we are seeing in the UK today is growth and expansion where there is already prosperity and a relative lack of growth where there is decline. New jobs where there are already jobs and no more jobs where there is already high unemployment. What is more, it seems that this exacerbation of the north-south divide is at least in part due to the impact of the social preferences of what is already an elite sector of the labour market. Of course there is electronics employment elsewhere in the country, outside of the south east. But this, as is now well known and well established, tends overwhelmingly to be in the "production end" of the sector. It is a specific example of the more general phenomenon mentioned earlier of the increasing separation of execution from conceptualisation. It should also be noted that while the R & D jobs continue to grow in number, employment in production has been falling consistently for a number of years. This only further reinforces the point that growth in new jobs is occurring where there are already the greatest concentrations of employment.

The other growth area of the economy has been in service employment. This, again, is well known, well established and well recognised. What is less well recognised however is that there has been a significant change over the last twenty years in the nature of growth of service employment. Between the mid 1960s and the mid 1970s that growth was overwhelmingly in the public services - that is in areas such as health and education. Since the late 1970s the emphasis has been completely reversed: today the main growth is in sectors such as banking and finance, professional services, and tourism, all within the private sector. For our purposes here, one of the aspects of this shift in emphasis which is significant is that public services and private services have very different geographies. While public services employment tends to be spread relatively evenly across the country as

a whole, in relation to population, employment in the private services listed above is, once again, overwhelmingly concentrated in the south eastern parts of the country.

All these changes together have combined to contribute to one of the most marked changes which have taken place in Britain since the late 1970s. This is the increasingly acute polarisation of the social structure. There is debate about this, about its form, and about exactly where the boundary lines can be drawn, but there is general agreement that inequality in a whole range of its manifestations has shown a marked increase since 1979. The decline of the manufacturing sector removed a large swathe of employment which, though not highly paid, was relatively well paid in working class terms. Many of the sectors which are growing, such as banking and electronics, exhibit employment structures which are acutely polarised between poorly paid workers involved in routine labour processes and extremely highly paid professionals and executives. Furthermore, changes within the labour process in a whole range of different industries seem to be leading, although the evidence here is perhaps less secure, to an increased dichotomisation between a core group of workers with relatively good remuneration and stable employment conditions, and in increasingly casualised, low status and low paid periphery.

All these processes too, as must already be evident, have re-worked the geography of the United Kingdom. Since the late 1970s the divide between the north and the south of the country has sharpened noticeably. The decline of the great northern industrial cities has continued unabated. Although there is some sign, in the most recent years, of a return to inner-city life, the more general process of ruralisation seems to be keeping up some momentum. And, dominating the geography of the country as a whole, London remains a magnet, not just in size but also in terms of control functions. It is a World City, one of the few foci at the highest level of the finance and banking world. And within it the polarisation between rich and poor has been increasing. There is certainly "urban crisis" in Britain, but its form has been changing, and that form is very different between the different cities of the country.

Moreover this is not just a changing economic geography; the changes are also cultural and political. In the old mining and manufacturing areas trades unionism has been torn apart, and some of the old traditions of solidarity have come under serious threat. In complete contrast, the more "rural" parts of the outer south east of the country have been termed the heartland of Thatcher. Here the dominant ideology is that favoured by the government, a celebration of individualism. Yet in the heart of it, in London, and also in the big cities across much of the country, we have witnessed the rise of a new urban left; it is another component in the generally shifting cultural and political geography of the country.

All these changes have thrown up significant issues and problems for us as urban, regional and industrial geographers. What I want to do now is take up just a few of these.

### What do we mean by Uneven Development?

The geographical decentralisation of production, to which I referred above and which was particularly marked in the 1960s and the early 1970s, lead to a greater degree of equality between the regions of the country, when measured on a certain range of indices. And yet, even while this greater equality on those indices was being registered, it was equally clear that in any wider sense there was no greater real equality between the north and the south, the centre and the periphery, of the country. While the south was increasingly the location of control and of conceptualisation, the north was seeing the decentralisation only of headless branch plants and direct production. While technical, professional and upper-echelon white collar jobs in general were increasing in the south, the emphasis in the north was far more on manual, and often typically routinised assembly-employment. While the cumulative effect of the processes underway in the south was to generate even further potential for growth, in the north the lack of coherence and interlinkage implicit in the branch plant development in (rather than of) the region created little such potential for the future. In other words, while on some indices it appeared that the regional problem was being at least mitigated, a wider view gave the lie to any such conclusion.

Or take another argument which is often made by theorists within the field of uneven development. In debates on spatial centralisation, it is frequently postulated that the concentration of capital in ownership terms will go along with a process of spatial concentration of economic development. Yet the period which I was discussing above was precisely one when the concentration of ownership within the British economy went hand in hand, and indeed was related in a causal way, with the decentralisation of economic activity, measured for instance by employment, in geographical terms.

The question which arises is: when we speak of uneven development how are we to understand that term? The uneven development of *what*? It is amazing how often the subject of uneven development is discussed without this fundamental question even being broached.

The conclusion to which I have come, and which seems to be one shared by many others, is that what is crucially at issue is the geography of the underlying relations of production. It is this geography, rather than any of its descriptive resultants such as the distribution of jobs,

which is at issue in the question of uneven development. Thus, to draw on examples which were mentioned earlier, the spatial separation both of control from production and of execution from conceptualisation marked shifts in the geographical organisation of capitalist relations of production. What can be conceptualised a-spatially (relations of capitalist production) also has - necessarily - a spatial form. And it is systematic patterns and consistencies in that spatial form which underlies what we call uneven development. Thus was born, in my own thinking, the idea of spatial divisions of labour. Schematically, what this idea is trying to get at is that with each new era of economic change (each new "round of investment"), a new set of spatial structures of production is likely to be evolved, which together will combine to form a new spatial division of labour, a new way in which capital organises itself over space, and indeed - and very importantly - a new way in which capital actively uses space. Moreover, within that spatial division of labour local areas will be incorporated in different ways, they will come to play new roles, distinct from their previous roles, in the new overall spatial division of labour.

Thus, in the United Kingdom, I argued that we have moved from a spatial division of labour characterised by regional sectoral specialisation, and which derived from our nineteenth century patterns of economic activity, through a period dominated simply by the separation of headquarters from branch plants, to a spatial division of labour which began to emerge in the mid 1960s based more importantly on the geographical separation of the different stages of production (on the geographical separation, that is, of different stages in the technical division of labour).

Moreover this conceptualisation of sequences of spatial divisions of labour, superimposed and intimately related and interacting with each other, is significant because each will lead, or so I hypothesise, to a different kind of "regional problem", and a different geography of social class. So what we confront today in the United Kingdom is a form of uneven development which is different not just in its pattern, but also in its fundamental nature, from the uneven development we inherited in the 1960s.

### Localities

The very different experiences, and contrasting trajectories, of different parts of the country during the twenty years which I have been discussing has been one influence which has led to an emphasis on the locality, and on the specificity of the local, within urban and regional geography in Britain.

To understand this development we need a little more intellectual history of the geographical debate within the UK over the decades. From the early part of this century the focus of the discipline of geography was very much on particular regions and on their uniqueness. In a very real sense the uniqueness of place was the object of study of the discipline at that time. With the 1960s, geography along with a whole range of other social science disciplines adopted a positivist framework. In such a context a focus on specificity was untenable and was lost. It continued to be lost in the Marxist critique which dominated the discipline in the 1970s, for in this critique the emphasis was overwhelmingly on unearthing and demonstrating the social relations of capitalism. In this context, the point of local studies was to demonstrate the operation of the laws of capitalism, to see how each local area was just one product of the wider forces of the mode of production, the place of intersection of general laws and general processes. What was really specific about the local area got lost in the urgency of demonstrating that all local areas were products of more general processes. We lost sight of specificity in our anxiety to establish this point of overriding importance. It is easy to talk with hindsight, and this stage in intellectual development was probably a necessary one. I am certainly not arguing that it was in any sense "incorrect". Nonetheless, we lost sight of specificity. Today, as a result of wider social and economic changes, a lesser urgency in our need to demonstrate our Marxism, and as a result of changes in Marxism itself, there is a focus again on locality, on specificity, and on uniqueness.

But this revived focus, which is not a simple replication of the old concern with the specificity of individual regions, itself raises a whole new set of problems.

First of all how is one to explain "the unique" without losing sight of the general processes which it is agreed are still fundamental to any explanation of specific outcomes. It is here that I would turn to another aspect of the spatial divisions of labour approach. Very schematically, I would argue that the uniqueness of an area is a product of the superimposition of "layers", of rounds of investment, of the combination over time of the different roles an area has played within the wider spatial division of labour. I would argue that each new layer, that is to say the social relations and processes of which it is made up, interacts with the past (which is already a pre-given uniqueness) to produce a new character, a new uniqueness, and that this in turn creates the conditions for the next layer, the next use of that space by capital.

Such an analysis can be applied to some of the mining areas in the United Kingdom. In the mid 1960s, when we began our story of the changing geography of the UK, there were areas overwhelmingly dominated by employment for men, by a manual working class, by a highly trade-unionised workforce within which ideologies of labourism were dominant, by

a wider ideology which saw men as the breadwinner and women as the homemaker. The role of these areas in the international division of labour had been one of exporting bases within Britain's wider position as a workshop and railway-builder to the world. The dominance of these particular regions by mining was part of the sectoral specialisation spatial division of labour which I referred to earlier. The decline of Britain's position in that particular international division of labour brought with it also the decline of coal mining in these regions. But that particular "layer" of investment had created specific conditions, particular elements within the wider pattern of uneven development, to which capital would now react. To some parts of capital the women of the area, never in previous recent generations having had the opportunity to work for money outside the home, were viewed as a green labour force, which could now go out to work outside the home and more pressingly needed to do so given the increasing unemployment amongst the men. This is just one of the ways in which the previous history of capital's use of those particular spaces was part of the condition for the generation of characteristics which capital would now use in a new way. In the period of decentralisation, the mid 60s to the mid 70s, these regions classically became the branch-plant outposts of multinationals during the period of decentralisation of production activities. As Britain's role within the international division of labour changed so did the role of these regions within the wider spatial division of labour. The new forms of investment brought their own requirements and influences to the area, the area itself influenced the way in which the production was established: the "layers" interacted with each other. A new synthesis was formed. Today, after a generation of unemployment, these areas are seeing a further change, the one which is really an adaptation of the previous decentralisation. There is still high unemployment, both amongst men and amongst women, but these regions continue to be the sites for inward investment. Nowadays, however, rather than investment in branch plants employing women, and plants which are decentralising from the central regions from the UK, it is much more likely to be foreign-based multinational capital which establishes new production facilities in these areas. And it is much more likely, too, that it will be men rather than women who are employed. It is almost as if the intervening period of male unemployment, since the 1960s in particular, had re-established the male labour force of these areas, partly through their vulnerability and partly through the emergence in the labour market of a new generation, as once again employable by capital. With each stage, therefore, the uniqueness of the area changes, it is re-moulded, re-fashioned.

It is necessary to emphasise this point about the interaction of layers, and their mutual influence. There has been decentralisation of jobs very similar to those which went to the mining areas, but to other parts of the country. Such jobs have gone there, for instance to more rural areas in other parts of the periphery, for different reasons and with different



effects. Here too they have drawn women into the workforce, sometimes for the first time, but the inheritance with which these new jobs are interacting, and the impact of this inheritance on them, and vice versa, has been quite distinct from that in the mining areas. I emphasise this point partly because the notion of interaction has frequently been underestimated, and also to emphasise the point that what we have here is an explanation of uniqueness in which it is precisely the interaction of general processes with the particular conditions in which they are operating which produces the specificity of any given outcome.

But these developments in turn give rise to a further set of sub-issues. I should like to mention three. The first is that while the initial focus on locality has produced a significant degree of understanding of how to explain uniqueness within the realm of what might roughly be called the economic, we are much less sure of how to proceed in other areas. In particular, there is continuing uncertainty and debate about how to approach the spheres of the cultural and of the political characteristics of localities.

The second issue is that a focus on uniqueness clearly makes itself vulnerable to a danger of sliding into pure descriptiveness. There have indeed been criticisms of the current research work on localities based on the argument that the studies do not focus sufficiently on "the general laws of capitalism". In my opinion that is to confuse issues. For us as geographers the question of specificity might have arisen in the context of local studies (and even this is only in part true). But that does not mean that the two things, locality and specificity, are equivalent. At one level, everything concrete is specific: is the product of many determinations. It is not a question of the scale of analysis. If we are looking at a national economy or society, or even at the international division of labour, we are still looking at a specific outcome, a product of many determinations. Always what we are seeing are general laws, and wider processes, being played out in specific conditions. Thus a particular philosophical focus at the moment is the question of how to link theoretical constructs to the particular form and conditions of their actual occurrence at any one time and place. If we are going to intervene politically, or if our work is in any way to be useful to such intervention, we have to achieve an understanding of this process.

The third issue which the focus on localities raises is also related to this wider political concern. None of us involved in the debate in the UK would argue that it is correct always and everywhere to have such a focus. The particular prioritisation of localities within the United Kingdom resulted from specific conditions: the immense variety of experiences which different parts of the United Kingdom were going through supposedly as a result of one and the same structural crisis, and the growing importance - for a time - of local struggle, especially through the local state. This latter point, the increasing importance of opposition

through the local state, is clearly paradoxical at a time of the increasing globalisation of capital. It is explicable in the United Kingdom in part as a result of the combination of the major impacts of the crisis within local areas in the context of a central state which committed its policies to market forces, rather than into any ameliorative intervention, and in part as a result of the fact that with a monetarist government in power the left found its only bases to be at local level.

The result was that a part of the organised left, including in some of the major cities of the country most particularly London, developed progressive economic strategies for their local areas. Such strategies were far removed from the old policies of simply trying to attract jobs and inward investment; rather they involved an active intervention into local economies. It was a strange reversal. It was many of the same people who, in the 1970s, had argued that it was impossible to explain the decline of urban economies at the level of the urban, and that it was impossible to do anything about the city at the level of the city. We argued for a focus on the wider forces, of national and international capitalism. Yet by the 1980s the same group of people were arguing strongly the need for local strategies, not on their own - for they are certainly insufficient on their own - but as an essential element of a wider strategy for progressive economic change. It is a discussion which still rumbles on.

This new political argument reinforces what was said above about the interaction between layers. What is being argued in both cases is that it is not just important to analyse local specificity in the context of wider processes, but also that "the local", in whatever form one conceives of it, can have an impact back on those wider processes. It is an impact back which has variously been termed the effectivity of the local and local proactivity. And it leads us on to the third and final issue.

### The social and the spatial

The argument here, and it is a theme-tune which has been taken up by many, is that "geography matters". It is argued that the spatial organisation of society is important, and has effects on how society operates. At one level, this may seem an unexceptionable claim, so let me once again trace a bit of history.

When geography emerged from its early twentieth century focus on the specificity and uniqueness of particular regions and places, it did so in part as the result of a critique by newly-triumphant positivists. It was a phenomenon that was common throughout many social science disciplines in the United Kingdom and Europe. And it led to the adoption within geography of the same methodological predispositions as in social sciences more

widely. But the adoption of a positivist methodology, with its particular notions of verification and generalisation, ruled out the unique as an object of study. The object of study of geography, in consequence, became "the spatial". A whole realm of "the spatial" was evolved: there were spatial processes, spatial laws, and spatial interaction models. The critique of the 70s, which relied largely on a new understanding of Marxism, argued quite correctly that such an interpretation of the world was without basis. The argument of the 70s was that "the spatial is socially constructed". It was, as I argued above, a necessary stage; but in retrospect it seems we bent the stick too far. For it led to our ignoring "geography". Space became simply a passive surface onto which the social processes which we were so concerned to analyse were mapped. Yet, with the benefit of further years of thought, it became clear that this too was insufficient. Today what is being recovered is some notion of the importance of the geographical dimension. However this dimension is not simply the abstract space of the regional science of the 1960s, but is concerned far more with the spatial organisation of society, the geography of the social relations of society. Today it is more commonly argued that not only space is socially constructed but that social processes necessarily take place in and over space, and that that has an effect on how they operate. In other words the social is also spatially constructed.

This sounds very good, but there are real questions of what it means in more precise terms. In empirical terms there are some obvious examples which can be drawn from what I have said already about recent developments within the United Kingdom. There have been clear cases for instance of the use of space within the United Kingdom by capital to fight off the first effects of the collapse of UK manufacturing. In this sense, uneven development and capital's ability to move over space have been active moments in the restructuring of the British economy. Or one might point to the impact of the north-south divide on the wider functioning of economy and society: the impact on the labour market, on output, on prices, even on the degree of growth in the economy which can be tolerated before the Chancellor of Exchequer has to impose a "credit squeeze". It is probably now not disputed by many that the north-south divide alters the way in which the economy, and the wider society, works.

These then, are ways in which geography matters in the functioning of a particular social system. The point at which debate still rages more deeply, concerns the level at which we should conceptualise social processes as having either spatial content or spatial implications. Here the constituency seems still to be divided, between those who on the one hand see space and the effects of geography as necessarily contingent, and those would argue that our conceptualisation must right from the very most abstract stages take into account of the fact that all social processes necessarily exist in and take place over space. It is a debate which is still unresolved, and which will certainly continue for some time yet.

But to finish, it is certainly the case that geography matters in a very real way politically in the UK today. Indeed it could be said that two of the biggest challenges which this government has faced in its ten years of power have had highly specific geographical bases and would not have been the same without such geographical bases. Indeed it can be argued that the Prime Minister has a very acute geographical sense in picking her enemies. So neither the miners strike of 1984 - 1985, nor the battle between the central government and the metropolitan counties of the great cities, would have been the same without the specific characteristics of the localities involved nor the strength which they drew from the fact of their geographical concentration. And on the night of the election in 1987 the newly re-elected Prime Minister announced, with total clarity, that one of her remaining battles to be fought was the battle for the hearts and minds of the inner cities.

Again it is a clear geographical focus. But why should such a focus have been picked, and why the inner cities? In part it is surely because the inner areas of some of the big cities are among the remaining bases of Labour Party and other left wing opposition to the current government. In part, too, it is fears of social unrest after the riots of 1981. In part too, it is certainly because capital and some elements of the middle class are rediscovering the inner city. There is new investment and gentrification. It is a phenomenon which is most important in London, but it is occurring too though on a smaller scale in other cities. Mrs. Thatcher's project in the inner cities is of course not simply to create jobs and employment, nor to improve the social conditions of those who already live there. Its clearest impact so far has indeed been to create greenfield sites in both economic and political terms. Local democratic powers have been abolished in some areas. So while the left has been rediscovering localism, the central government has been centralising. At the level of the city, local alliances have frequently been formed, often between an apparently left wing local state and local capital. The local state sees itself as having been forced into such alliances, as the only option now available to generate any economic resuscitation. On the other hand in some instances local industrial capital has been frightened by the possibility of further central government interference in their areas. So "space" has been important here in British politics. It is one of the axes around which political battles have been fought, its active use has been part and parcel of the negotiations. In this sense at least, geography matters.

But it is important not to bend the stick too far the other way! There is no intention here, nor I am sure in the work of others who would also argue that geography matters, that we should concentrate on "space" and its effectivity, *as opposed to the importance of divisions* such as those of gender, race and class. *One of the arguments concerning the inner city and its current social and economic malaise precisely concerns the relation between the social and*

the spatial. The current central government in the United Kingdom sees the inner city problem primarily in spatial terms. The problems is that certain "areas" pose threats, and present opportunities for commercial development. With such an interpretation, a policy which results in property development in the inner city and its physical rehabilitation will also solve the inner city problem. But the inner city problem clearly is *not* a spatial one in that sense. It is not to be defined as a problem of place. The real problem of the inner city is the result of a combination of social and economic processes. Simply developing the inner city in property terms will only result in the decentralisation of poverty; it will not change the wider mechanisms which we discussed at the beginning of this paper. In the end, like other problems, it is a social issue, not simply a spatial one.

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