

PATHOLOGICAL LOCALISM OR VERNACULAR GLOCALIZATION? POPULISM, GLOBALISM AND THE EVERYDAY POLITICS OF ANGER

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Abstract: Globality and consciousness of it are reflexively linked, possibly through a modal empathy whereby all humanity has a built-in predisposition for social understanding and cooperation. But in more ardent accounts of world-making, global awareness produces not empathy but identities in conflict, insecurity and woundingly agonistic politics. An intriguing and forceful example of global consciousness having the potential to cut both ways is the current wave of populism: a seemingly localist force that may still produce glocalist outcomes. This essay explores some of the visceral factors that underlie such variability.

Keywords: localism, glocalization, populism, global consciousness, anger.

INTRODUCTION

Globality and the consciousness of it are reflexively linked, possibly through a modal empathy whereby all humanity has a built-in predisposition for social understanding and cooperation. But in more hard-nosed accounts of world-making, global awareness produces not empathy but identities in conflict, insecurity, resentment and woundingly agonistic politics. An intriguing, and perhaps seminal, example of global consciousness having the potential to cut both ways is the current wave of populism, an apparently localist force that may yield glocalist outcomes. Undoubtedly, populism takes its strength from anti-globalism (making it a thicker ideology than is often supposed). But need its politics disport as a pathological localism? In many accounts, populism is short-

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hand for a politics of anger, subject to an aesthetic reflexivity that elevates emotion over rationality in response to the perceived failures of reflexive modernization and globalization. This has led to a search for, or reversion to, more “authentic”, and certainly more expressive components of self and collective identity. At such a pass, the idea of there being a local context to global processes is an anodyne way of saying that these emotions invest place with meaning and value. Of course, anti-globalism has also triggered other forms of contentious politics and of these some are local and others glocal, with the emergent properties of that condition. As well as varieties of populism, new social movements – of indigenous peoples, climate change protestors, communitarians, feminists and Trans activists – have all invoked elements of the romantic-aesthetic tradition to foster a vernacular glocalization, or a robust localism.

Populism may, or may not, be an anti-global ideology, but it is certainly an expression of distaste and anger born of everyday reactions to globalization; to its experienced and imagined depredations. While it trades on rhetorical absolutes – the people, homeland, sovereignty and so on – all peremptory, on the ground, as it were, it may be a less determinate phenomenon which is characteristically “glocal”, while still being a vehicle for anger at the unfair ways and biased demeanour of the world.

GLOCALIZATION (AND POPULISM)

Glocalization is a modal feature of all global systems. As Victor Roudometof says, it replaces the crude binary of local and global and it tends to relationships that are symbiotic or complementary (2018: 3). But for anti-globalisers, including populists, it is at best an ambivalent solution to the threats posed by global platforms, networks and flows – both phenomenal and disembodied – to local integrity. Ambivalent, because the logic of, or systemic dynamic, expressed through processes of glocalization may succour the local in some measure, but can also defray pristine localism which valorizes

national exceptionalism. At the same time, hybridization – which is the hallmark of glocalization – is evidence of the indigenization of processes otherwise presented as moving to their own logic. All of which countermands both the “cultural logic of globalization” narrative, wherein attempts to protect the local mean running against the tide of history, or economic inevitability and energetic localist arguments to the effect that localism is not only viable, but the seminal counterpoint to globalization (Roudometof 2018).

The relationship between globalization and populism is an echo of the trope already familiar to students of globalization; the antinomy of sameness and difference played out as an elemental dialectic of global and local. This dialectic is apparent in both routine and non-threatening ways – in the day-to-day engagements between local and situated subjects and global networks and flows – as well as in more visceral encounters. On the face of it, populism – and certainly national populism – is the antithesis of globalization. It is a sanguineous appeal to and evocation of militant and pristine difference couched as resistance by “the people” to the wilful and wanton destruction of the particular, the local and the idiosyncratic by remote and uncaring elites, indifferent economic forces, and a host of malign, or opportunistic, others (Eatwell, Goodwin 2018; Friedman 2018; Mudde 2004). The rallying cry of “the people”, employed as a stick with which to beat opponents, is itself highly charged when used in populist rhetoric, not least because it is conceptually imprecise and normatively laden when used in different political idioms. In one of the many paradoxes of the populist credo – if such exists –, its advocates appeal to the inclusive subject of “the people”, but are selective about conferring membership, or cavalier about actual numbers. They favour those with notionally “authentic” claims to a particular birthright and the heirs to bespoke, albeit imagined, histories. Sometimes, “the people” is conjured as a rhetorical device to justify actions and to demean opposing views.

The related, though not coterminous, processes of localization and glocalization provide a nuanced conceptual and analytical framework for understanding the imbrication of

populism and globalization; both of which have undergone changes of late. In this essay I will develop the argument that populism is a facet of local–global interaction, with a repertoire of vernacular responses to what is often seen as a secular integrative process. Because of the sovereigntist turn in both politics and scholarship, the concept of localization becomes especially charged as a description of world-defining practice today. That said, for many observers, new – or any – globalization is really glocalization by another name.

There are more acerbic accounts. In one of these, populism musters as a fervid localism, playing out the elemental dichotomy of local and global. Populist rhetoric, with its stress on “down-home” parochialism, lends weight to that attribution (Roudometof 2016, 2018). In practice, local–global relations are likely to be crystalized through refraction, with the global refracted through the local, and thus “reveal the ways in which the very creation of localities is a standard component of globalization” (Giulianotti, Robertson 2007: 134). This is some way from seeing globalization as a process in which peoples and their cultures are doomed to annihilation or, less emotively, where local identities and cultural communities are routinely beset or irretrievably damaged by global constraints. Instead, the blanket idea of constraints commutes to an understanding that indigenes and national/local cultures exist “in a global framework, both self-consciously drawing on globalized strategies, for example of rights and identity, as well as being objectively situated through international legal frameworks” (Giulianotti, Robertson 2009: 28; see also Kearney 1995). Couched thus, as Habibul Khondker advises, the idea of glocalization “captures the interpenetration of the local and the global” (2019: 97).

These issues comprise one of the most intensely debated themes in the study of globalization, namely the “analytical and empirical degrees of freedom that may be discerned in how local cultures engage with ‘the global’” (Giulianotti, Robertson 2009: 31). In this debate the usual binary distinctions, even antinomies, of universal and particular and local and global are often invoked. But to reiterate, for global scholarship at any rate, the default position today is that “any particu-

lar experience, identity or social process is only comprehensible with reference to universal phenomena” (Giulianotti, Robertson 2009: 32). The “globalwide nexus” of the particular and the universal produces complex interrelationships, and these are mostly glocal in cast. Where does populism fit with all this?

The local, however construed, is where potential or immanent global homogeneity gets articulated with the vernacular, both actually and metaphorically. The outcome may be new cultural hybrids or syncretic forms and these are likely to be glocal, with the emergent properties of that condition (Raz 1999). Rarely do such encounters produce pristine “local” outcomes – where that disports as a more holistic and uncompromised ontology – and this despite the intent of avid localists, including populists. While the existence of glocalization projects severely modifies any sense that globalization is an abstract and totalizing process, it also qualifies equally stark localist solutions to the pressures of global convergence, in practice if not in polemic and ideology. At the same time, the enduring currency of the local points to the importance of social and territorial place in social theory, in political practice and in identity formation. So the question is, how far do local imaginaries end up as glocal because accommodation with global constraints and entanglements is highly likely, not to say inevitable? And if they remain resolutely localist, need this mean a defensive and absolutist strain of localism – an angry provincialism or a defensive populism?

Most theorists of glocalization refute the assumption that globalization processes always endanger the local. Rather, they argue that “glocalization shows how individuals and local cultures may critically adapt or resist ‘global’ phenomena”, thus demonstrating that globalization’s ontology relies on processes of glocalization. And as we know, the formation of both mutable “emergent glocalities” and “ruttled localities” takes place not only through connection, but through “micro-social” incursions and ruptures as agents adopt tactics that make sense of the world in which they live, and either endorse or combat what they see there (Hulme 2015: 31). Such tactics remind us of the contingent nature of the processes in train, although

with populism, as I intimated above, we are enjoined to see it as an absolutist and pathological strain of localism – the enemy of accommodation. In populist rhetoric at least, accommodating global forces, possibly through hybridization, always appears, or can be portrayed, as a betrayal of the people and the loss of culture. And in some respects, this is not a distorted interpretation of the reaction of populists (as avid localism) to the global. While the very idea of glocalization assumes a degree of flexibility in the mesh of local and global, localization (and certainly localism) imparts a more essentialist feel that valorizes “place” and “identity”, sometimes in brutalist or realist form (Roudometof 2018).

Globalization is a challenge to the very idea of boundaries, but social practices tied to its complex and contradictory toils allow actors to refurbish or reinvent the idea of locality or community, sometimes tied to actual places. Of course, this formulation rejects the idea of local and global being distinct zones of activity, or self-contained geographical scales, though some varieties of anti-globalist politics insist that they are. Indeed, with varying degrees of approbation, there are many narratives that depict globalization primarily as a state – and nation-altering process, irrespective of populism. Never immaculate, the national is routinely disrupted, though never completely debilitated, by the speed and density of transborder connective practices. National populism is a backlash against perceived unbridled globalization of this kind, but also against the messier, though arguably more likely, prospect of the glocalization of once or would-be immaculate enclaves, to produce *mélange* cultures. Globalities, glocalities and localities are obviously “made” through the intercourse of agency and structures, but globalization and glocalization also take place “behind the backs” of agents rather than through strategic intent. By contrast, localism is full of strategic intent, and some bluster, based on the premise – at least where populism is concerned – that there is an ontological and moral divide between global and local that must be policed. In this *gestalt*, glocalization is an impure process of intermingling; localism – in both inclusive and exclusionary forms – is essentialist.



GLOCALIZATION, LOCALIZATION AND LOCALISM

As Habibul Khondker notes, “globalization and glocalization are entangled in the empirical world” (2019: 107). So, from a research perspective the core of the matter is to identify the processes, accommodations and ruptures involved in producing, reproducing and sometimes altering, local contexts and local subjects in a globalizing world. Glocalities are the product of world-making practices that involve intensification in world-wide connectivity on the one hand, and increasingly reflexive global consciousness on the part of (local and mostly situated) actors on the other. The process of glocalization highlights both the resilience in local ways of doing things and the scope for changing them. Glocalization always implies mixing. It underscores the mutability and negotiability of reputedly inexorable universal constraints or secular convergence. At the same time, the very notion of glocalization reminds us that locals exist in a global framework where, among other things, they “self-consciously draw on globalized strategies” to subvert and legitimate their sense of difference (Phipps 2009: 28).

If globalization implies cultural convergence, and populism (though not only populism) prescribes social differentiation and even polarization, then glocalization implies hybridity. The concept of cultural hybridization identifies the mixing of cultures affected by globalization and the creation of new, sometimes unique, hybrid cultures that cannot be designated either local or global. Hybridization is the default position of globalization optimists and for those who want to use the concept as a way of understanding the complex and contradictory facets of cultural globalization. And it is quite easy to depict cultural globalization as hybridization, and thus as the cultural structure of globality. One such account says that globalization is “structural hybridization or the emergence of new, mixed forms of social cooperation and cultural hybridization, or the development of translocal *mélange* cultures” (Nederveen Pieterse 2015: 46). Others reject the idea that identity construction can ever be a postmodern pick-and-mix process.

There are many forms of hybridization and they all challenge boundaries, whether local or civilizational, phenomenal or imagined. Hybridization also runs against the grain of hegemonic projects. In hybrid cultures, cultural syncretism rather than cultural synchronization is modal and, in this regard, there are many exemplars. Jan Nederveen Pieterse mentions East-West fusion cultures, the Latin-American idea of the “mestizo”, of in-between identities and cultures found in creole communities, and the *mélange* cultures of global cities. Even the ill-defined notion of “Europeanization”, until Brexit and Covid-19 much in vogue as a prescription for Europe-making, can be seen as a form of trans-glocal and hybrid imaginary. The sheer creativity of cultural hybrid formation is then a transformative social dynamic, although we should not assume that prior to hybridization, discrete cultural enclaves existed everywhere. But for populists, none of this matters; or it matters to the extent that not only globalization, but also glocalization and anything resembling hybridization are deemed inimical to the survival of the national imaginary.

Is there room for some jobbing accommodation in all this, with the local parading as “the geographical location for the successful articulation of the cosmopolitan” (Roudometof, 2018: 3)? Maybe, but any such prospect still infuriates populists, as well as some non-populist locals. As Fred Dallmayr cogently puts it, for all the globalist delight in the prospects for a borderless world, the values of deterritorialization and embrace of global “nomadism” are shared only by an “elite of financiers and corporate executives, while ordinary people are increasingly impoverished and tied to obscure localities” (Dallmayr 2017: 2). Even if this is a polemical construction, it is a recognizable summary of “backlash” politics as evidenced most obviously by Brexit.

LOCALIZATION AND LOCALISM

Glocalization is the accommodation of space and place. But localization is better understood as a process of “place-making”, and thus underlines the importance of local context

in making social worlds (Roudometof 2018 see also Bauman 2013). “Localism” then ramps up the stakes implied in the notion of “local context” because it expresses the “experiential, emotional and aesthetic feeling of a particular location being endowed with meaning and value” (Roudometof 2018: 5). Unless used as a descriptive term to denote a territorial unit of government, the notion of locality and of identities rooted in place carry with them a timeless and fundamental quality, which bespeaks depth and wholeness or, as Richard Rorty has it, “authenticity” (1992: 46). And as 40 years of constructivist scholarship tells us, even recognizing a process as socially constructed – “imagined” – need not detract from its “meaningfulness” for actors (Wendt 1992). The celebration of locality, of place, also taps a deeply nostalgic and sentimental vein of consciousness worlds away from liquid global (post)modernity (Bauman, Bordoni 2014). As Fred Dallmayr also notes, “*heimat* (homeland) stands in contrast to the warp of the world today: namely the ‘homelessness’ of modern human beings who have been wrenched or torn away” from rootedness, and bereft of anything other than subaltern recognition (2017). Paradoxically the images of “lost” worlds are often carried through the very media that are dissolving the psychological boundaries of the local imaginary, or eroding “traditional places within a culture” (Rabinow 1993: 67).

National populism subscribes to the myth of a “natural” isomorphism of people, territory and culture; a pristine worldview that is some way from seeing local-global relations as a contingent and messy accommodation with diversity, and taking joy from that knowledge. We all know that globalization is the dialectic of space and place, but that is only the starting point for analysis. For as John Short opines, “the spatial dialectic of globalization is the construction of space and the creation of place. Globalization constructs space through space–time convergence, cultural homogenization, economic re-globalization, and political (dis)integration” (2001: 18). But the same forces are also creating places. Nationalism, community consciousness and the self-conscious construction of ethnic identity are as much part of globalization as 24-hour financial and futures markets and global travel (Short 2001: 18).



Localization describes the processes whereby “place-making naturalizes and constructs a locale as a place” (Roudometof 2018: 10). Like glocalization, this can be a benign and routine process, but “localisms [also] adopt an essentialist view of place”, and this informs their message and the kind of appeal they have for citizens made “homeless” by globalization (Roudometof 2018: 12). In populist form, localism then appears less an out-and-out celebration of locality, confident and aspirational, and more a solace for those who feel stripped of the comforting solidarities of place and, judging by the expanding ranks of the precariat, class and status too, along with the apparent certainties of gender, ethnic and religious identities.

Bruno Latour speaks of the longing for a return to the “land of Old” that is inspired by the erosion of seemingly timeless values and institutions that supported a better quality of life (Latour 2016). In reality, vaunting the local imaginary – and valorizing land and territory – to redress perceived inauthenticity and experiential slight can spill over into a much harsher politics of difference, because the charge of being thought of, or seen as, “inauthentic” is still a very powerful one in a world where identities continue to be sundered, and where there is diminishing hope of finding and keeping safe ground. For populists and, to be fair, for many others, difference is not a garb put on for the sake of convenience or fashion, but the expression of serious, even fundamental cleavages. Being stranded between some cultural spaces and only lightly implicated in others, may be a liberating experience, providing room for an embrace of all kinds of otherness. But it can trigger a more brutal, or hard-nosed politics based on suspicion, exclusion and the desire to root out anything deemed inauthentic.

Latour has his own take on the shortcomings of contemporary politics, and it gives a further twist to the usual antinomy between local and global. On the one hand, the former presumes resistance that is rooted in the perceived authenticity of place, but too often gives rise to nationalism and xenophobia. So, recourse to “the land” as a signifier of resistance to globalization, and liberation from its rigours, would mean



ridding it of any regressive connotation. Leftist mythologies of revolt provide no real guidance here because the left has always viewed attachment to land, turf and territory as reactionary impulses. On the other hand, the global – spear-carrier for liquid modernity – comprises a planetary order driven by a reflective belief in progress and an unabridged mastery over nature.

POPULISM AND LOCALISM

Nuances aside, the politics of some localisms and most populisms translate the binaries of local and global, sameness and difference, into a “set of oppositions” with “emergent cosmopolitanism” at one pole, and reactive indigenization (including populism) at the other, as Jonathan Friedman notes (2018). Globalist discourses muster as open, cosmopolitan, multicultural, liberal, anti-sovereign, anti-indigenous and pro-immigration. For critics who equate globalization with the expansion of neoliberal capitalism or a vogueish cosmopolitanism, these features are a roll-call of the world’s ills, or of good intentions lost to the harsh logic of market economics and rich people’s fancy. By contrast, localist discourse is closed, nationalist, monocultural, conservative, collectivist (including socialist), pro-sovereign, pro-indigenous and anti-immigration. Obviously, there is a strong polemical component to both attributions.

But Friedman’s binaries probably underestimate the ambiguity and contradiction in the attitudes and demeanour of populists, globalists and cosmopolitans alike; and may therefore misread the scope for accommodation. Glocalist outcomes are one such accommodation, and reinstating the local as a site for democratic agonism, citizen activism and civic responsibility is another. Yet judged by the rhetoric of populists and their opponents there is scarcely room for manoeuvre. To its opponents, localist politics built around populist tenets is always regressive – backward-looking, authoritarian, exclusionary, xenophobic and unutterably shallow – all by definition. To its proponents, it reinstates the legitimacy and dynamism of the everyday politics of place. For its part, cosmopoli-

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tan (globalist) discourse also triggers shades of approbation and contumely.

We live in turbulent times, of late made even more fraught. The frailty of societies noted by Carlo Bordoni (Bauman, Bordoni 2014), is evidenced in many dislocations, including the global health pandemic of 2020. For some years this turbulence has contributed to a politics built around the set of oppositions adverted above, and these, whether long- or short-term, inflame suspicion of centrist politics and inclusive notions of community. In the early days of the pandemic, the existential threat of Covid-19 muted the blare of usual politics, at least as this was reported across different media. Elsewhere, and notably on “alt-tech” social media platforms, the threat of the virus was weaponized to foment anti-semitic hatred (Ehsan 2020). In Italy, during the mid-spring of 2020, Antonio Pappalardo’s “Orange Vest” movement fanned the embers of populist anger at the restrictions imposed by the health crisis, claiming it was a conspiracy against common sense and against the people.

But pandemic or not, where cynicism and distrust of elites have become the norm, how likely is it that large numbers of people will redeem their faith in the political class and in experts, rather than opt out altogether? As things stand, we cannot know yet. So the option may still be populism, expressed as angry parochialism, or some other redemptive formula. Thus couched, localism musters as “populism spatially expressed”, and the valorization of “the local” is another way of referencing “the people” (Peacock 2020: 141). Yet even if the effects of Covid-19 temporarily subsume other factors, the longer-term failures of market globalism and the processes of what Appadurai calls “cellular”, networked globalization remain key factors in forging and sustaining discontent (2006), along with what Fukuyama calls the “new identity politics” (2017).

In the throes of the Covid-19 crisis even this troubled and contested world is open to a more exacting set of futures. For all the talk of and need for concerted action and common cause, who now embraces globalism with equanimity, save perhaps the globalization of medical and scientific expertise

and hopeful calls for greater cross-border cooperation? When the pandemic eases, except in virtual worlds, will we return wholesale to the cultures of speed and mobility that were taken-for-granted by huge numbers of people, and became the benchmarks of a postmodern global cultural economy? If localism triumphs on the back of the pandemic, will it cling to any of the routines of centrist politics, eventually relax suspicion of strangers and neighbours, or continue to enact a defensive and sometimes visceral persona in a parody of local democracy, responsible government and civility? And if the latter, will there be overwhelming pressures to revert to, or else foster, the reality of “natural economy”? Will “on-shoring” of production and supply replace “off-shoring”? Is the future populist, nationalist or just more ruggedly and more comprehensively statist? Having intimated that the temper of the world is set to glocal, which lends it an in-between as well as an indeterminate constitution, of late we may be forgiven for entertaining all such possibilities.

POPULISM AS PATHOLOGICAL LOCALISM OR VERNACULAR GLOCALIZATION

Obviously, none of these scenarios amount to what Arjun Appadurai calls an “elegy to the local” (2020), yet with the exception of the first they all advert more-or-less intense localist outcomes. The temper of the politics then delivered will depend on the detail of their structuration. And here there is varied and sometimes conflicting evidence.

Let’s stay with the possible effects of Covid-19, no longer a limiting case scenario. What will be the economic and social fallout, along with the political consequences? The longer the crisis lasts, the more damaging its economic effects. Continued obstacles to the free movement of capital, people, goods and services, and disruption to technically intricate, and currently modal, just-in-time production and supply chains all challenge the balance of the marketized global economy and the kind of societies it curates, even if they do not predicate the complete undoing of these features (Milanovic 2020). At such a pass,

the clamour for economic self-sufficiency and security, especially in agricultural and health products, is likely to increase exponentially, always justified by the fear of worse depredations to come unless the world disaggregates and the gates are barred. Even the rollout of successful vaccines does not modify these considerations entirely.

This would be a global reset of enormous proportions, little short of a new great transformation. And despite safeguards being mustered to protect and thus reassure citizens, in such circumstances a sense of ontological insecurity will be rife; a rational enough response on the part of those dispossessed of jobs, income, shelter and the buffer of insurance. The upshot could be social dislocation in many places, including in the capitals of the once-upon-a time hyper-globalist dream. Who, if anyone, benefits politically from this amount of dislocation and anxiety? It is easy to say that populists will, since the demand to pull up the drawbridge in the spirit of protective localism is their USP. But would it be that simple?

Throughout the Covid-19 crisis, defeated United States president Donald Trump was at pains to downplay its severity, a stance occasioned by his desire to reap electoral dividends in 2020 by reopening the US economy as soon as possible. Throughout his single term of office, Trump traded on the image of “know-nothing” populism, barely hiding his contempt for expertise and often complaining that domestic critics are, at best, unwitting agents of America’s foes. His reluctance to heed advice and lead the fight against the pandemic in the US and globally reaped an ill dividend in the shape of electoral defeat.

I am writing this in early December 2020, just after the still-contested presidential election. Infection and death rates are high, the American economy is in a parlous condition and continued high unemployment remains a political sore. Racial conflict and the politics of identity have badly damaged the trust placed by most Americans in their system of government and constitutional formula. Trump’s credentials were found wanting in his defeat by Democratic candidate Joe Biden, but his version of “America First” was endorsed – or not repudiated – by seventy-four millions of the US electorate, a record

high for a defeated candidate. How should the runes be read? At present it is too soon to tell with any certainty. Trump lost the election – now confirmed by the Electoral College – but the politics he endorsed lives on; and the anger and even grief it articulated have not been assuaged. In short, the future of American politics and the demeanour of the body politic is moot.

All of which complicates the rush to judgement about populist and authoritarian regimes being able to take unparalleled advantage of current circumstances to boost their profile or consolidate power. Across the world there is evidence of an increase in human rights violations and suppression of dissent, along with a barrage of fake news and disinformation originating in authoritarian countries and directed against their own citizenry and sources of opposition in the freer world (Henry Jackson Society 2020a). But how complacent can populist “strongmen” be in these times? The fact is that governments of all persuasions have taken a marked statist turn in their attempts to combat the Covid-19 pandemic, tracked by accusations of creeping authoritarianism, unwarranted surveillance and, if they are of a centre-right persuasion, of a dangerous flirtation with socialism. Such developments sync with recent trends in globalization and may serve to deepen the sovereignist tendency these comport. And if that becomes the new normal would it militate against pragmatic glocalizations and in favour of passionate localisms?

Attempts to limit the “spatial sovereignty of globalization” rely, as Arjun Appadurai notes, on fashioning, then sustaining, a “classic, deep, naturalized alliance between the local, the sovereign, the archival and the teleological” (2020: xx). For populists, as well as for localists who may be populist, globalization threatens “history, nation and the covenant between the two” (Appadurai 2020: xx). A politics aimed at maintaining the connection between them can display some visceral, not to say pathological, traits, depending on the degree of perceived threat and on the objects of exclusion. Writing about Myanmar and Sri Lanka, Michael Gravers (2015) details the conflicts seen during colonial times, but translated to the present when nationalism linked to the Buddhist faith



and ethnicity results in violence and ethnic cleansing of migrant populations such as Burmese Rohingya Muslims. As Gravers says, violence appears when the religious imaginary is “integrated into a nationalist ideology of cultural/ethnic identity and a kind of political organization is formed” (2015: 71). In this case, localism traffics as a defence of religion. In other cases, it is wielded as a shield against perceived threats from any minority, indeed from any source.

But other localisms are less red in tooth and claw; a reassuring qualifier since the goal of localism and demands for self-determination, even “taking back control”, are present in all populist visions. Here the centre – central government, its bureaucracies and cohort elites – acts as “the symbolic location of the bureaucratic, elitist, unaccountable ‘other’”, “that staple of populist rhetoric” (Peacock 2020: 39). Clearly, not all demands for self-determination come from populist sources, and of those that do, only some display authoritarian and ethno-nationalist features. And while much of this rhetoric has a within-nation reference, where it demands greater devolution and constitutional autonomy, it is obviously applicable to the idea of the local-as-national pitted against the homogenizing thrust and dubious legitimacy of the global “centre”, with the latter depicted variously as some kind of world government, or shadowy oligopoly comprised of global corporations and Big Tech platforms.

Authoritarian and ethno-national strains aside, for the most part within-nation localism does not look like a pathological alternative to democratic elitism. As Peacock says, both localism and populism share a narrative in which democracy benefits from devolution, and devolution brings government closer to the people. This is a conceit evinced by left- and right-wing populists, though how much is imaginative rhetoric or campaign bluster is open to question. Writing about the years of coalition government in the UK between 2010 and 2015, Tait and Inch note that the government’s narrative of more decentralization and empowerment was, in some measure, an early “populist response to a perceived crisis of trust in the British system, rocked at the time by the financial crisis and its mutation into a crisis of public spending” (Tait and



Inch 2016: 176). As a piece of political artifice this still looks fairly innocuous, but the Leave campaign in the 2016 referendum on membership of the EU, embodied a more strategic and robust version of the same impulse. But lest we get too one-sided in interpreting events, Katz and Nowak (2018) actually see localism as a survival strategy for democracy in a period of rising populism, looking to reinstate, rather than despoil, old virtues. Here rootedness implies “real, active and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves in living shape certain particular measures of the past and certain explanations of the future” (Weil 1952: 56).

All this has very little in common with ethnocentrism, exclusionary patriotism and, as Weil says, “self-idolatry”. But it may take too much in the way of normative investment to come to such a judgement, or to believe that populism is the only real defence of local democracy and of non-material worlds. Overall, though, localism looks like an off-the-shelf option as a populist strategy, with the variety of localisms, or local contexts, adding more bespoke elements.

Populism presents as different varieties of localism and we warm to some more than others. Some reveal a pathological strain; others much less so, looking more like a variant of usual politics for straitened times. So, what price populism as a form of vernacular glocalization? Perhaps we can agree that at their most general both localism and populism are a reactive and romantic flight from globalization and its rampant spatialities. That said, all social worlds tend to hybrid or impure forms. Hybridization involves fitting or adapting an idea to a place, so that it melds with the warp of local experience. In theory – and certainly rhetorically – populism tends to exclusivism and essentialism. But even in the more hard-nosed cases mentioned above that yearning for essentialism decants to the hybrid in-between-ness characteristic of multiple glocalizations, to produce what Fred Dallmayr calls a “glocal praxis” (2017: 13).

We must keep the last option open as it syncs with the idea of a more strategically adroit and malleable populism. The truth is that we are at a profound conjuncture in the career of modern globalization, and the politics are messy; the outcomes indeterminate. What is transpiring does not signal

an end to or reversal of globalization, but adverts the reworking of its ontology in changing, and increasingly turbulent, circumstances. Populism is a solvent in that process, with its effects not fully realised, and not yet climacteric. Things may change.

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