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Still ‘like birds on the wire’? Freedom after neoliberalism

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Abstract

In this paper I suggest that we might understand some features of contemporary populism by reworking the concept of ‘authoritarian populism’ first proposed by Stuart Hall in his analysis of ‘Thatcherism’. Following a brief review of my earlier analytics of ‘governing through freedom’, I suggest that while the political movements identified by the names of Trump, Wilders, Le Pen, the Austrian Freedom Party, the True Finns etc. may be ephemeral, it is worth considering whether they are beginning to articulate a new set of rationalities and technologies for governing ‘after neoliberalism’. I analyse some key elements of these movements, the new epistemologies that they employ, and the ethopolitics that they espouse, and suggest that the key operative concepts may be ‘the people’, security, and control. We may still be ‘birds on the wire’ as Leonard Cohen once put it, but perhaps what we are enjoined to seek in these strategies for ‘governing liberty’ is not so much freedom but security.

Keywords: authoritarian populism; governmentality; liberty; the people; security; control.

I am not trying to say that liberation as such, or this or that form of liberation, does not exist: when a colonized people attempts to liberate itself from its colonizers, this is indeed a practice of liberation in the strict sense. But we know very well... that this practice of liberation is not in itself sufficient to define the practices of freedom that will still be needed if this people, this society, and these individuals are to be able to define admissible and acceptable forms of existence or political society. This is why I emphasize practices of freedom over processes of liberation; ... [demands for liberation] ... do not seem to me, to be capable by themselves of defining all the practical forms of freedom.... .

(Michel Foucault, 1994, pp. 282-283)

Introduction¹

Freiheit – who of my generation can forget Leonard Bernstein conducting Beethoven's 9th Symphony in East Berlin at Christmas 1989 to celebrate the fall of the Berlin Wall, with *Freiheit* – freedom – replacing *Freude* – Joy – an ode to freedom.² Freedom was on everyone's lips in the revolutions in government in the 1980s commonly termed 'neoliberalism': the triumph of the free world over communism, the triumph of the free market over the planned economy, the triumph of the autonomous individual 'free to choose'. But – in what I prefer to term 'advanced liberalism'³ - freedom was not just as a slogan of resistance, but a doctrine for governing. It was not just rhetoric, nor simply a 'political rationality' but was linked to 'technologies' for rendering that rationality operational. That was the argument of my inaugural lecture at Goldsmiths College in 1992 – 25 years ago – which I called *Towards a critical sociology of freedom* (Rose, 1992). I wrote that lecture in an untimely spirit, that is to say against the spirit of the times, in the sense which Friedrich Nietzsche gives to the term at the start of his *Untimely meditation* on 'The uses and disadvantages of history for life': 'I do not know what meaning [my studies] could have for our time', he says, 'if they were not untimely - that is to say, acting counter to our time, and therefore acting on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come' (Nietzsche, 1983, p. 60). However, my aim in that lecture was not to argue that the freedom that we were being offered was a sham, and to hope for a more authentic freedom to come. Rather, I argued that to govern *in the name of freedom* required translating that language into technologies, to render freedom technical, both in terms of governing practices for our authorities and in terms of ethical technologies for ourselves. And I suggested that while the paradoxes of the welfare state had come under sustained attack from both left, right and liberals over the preceding twenty years (Hirschman, 1991), it was the right, rather than the left, that managed to shape an alternative mode of governing, framed around the ideas of freedom and autonomy, and inventing or repurposing a whole variety of devices for rendering those technical. What had emerged was not 'liberation' but a set of mechanisms for administering a population that depended upon the capacities of free individuals, which gave that freedom a very particular form, and which utilized a

range of technologies to inculcate the attributes thought necessary for individuals and organizations to conduct themselves in freedom.⁴

That was then, this is now. Where is freedom today, in the era of ‘authoritarian populism’? Or to put it another way, to diagnose what is going on today, would we start with the question of freedom? I began to wonder about this when I first heard the name of Jorg Haider’s right wing nationalist party in Austria – the Austrian Freedom Party. And then of Geert Wilder’s analogous movement in the Netherlands – the Dutch Party *for* Freedom. How, I naively wondered, can these right-wing nationalist parties, which seem to any observer to be fundamentally *illiberal*, place themselves under the banner of freedom? True, the word is not on the bannerhead of the True Finns, Alternatives for Germany, the Danish People’s Party, or the French National Front.⁵ So is this adoption of the word freedom more than a mere political ploy – in the way that the equivalent party in Sweden calls itself the Swedish Democratic Party? Is a new ‘governmentality’ taking shape, and if so, does the question of freedom still lead us to its heart?

In short, I think the answer is yes and no! Or, to put it more precisely, I want to argue that, yes, we are seeing the emergence of new ways of thinking about how to govern, and new technologies for governing are being adopted or invented. And no, while ideas of freedom have not disappeared, we need a different analytics of freedom ‘after neoliberalism’,⁶ not governing in the service of freedom but governing to safeguard liberty. And I shall suggest that this emerging configuration – we could call it ‘governing liberty’ – is framed in terms of the linked ideas of ‘the people’, ‘security’ and ‘control’. But before addressing this directly, let me return to those arguments from a quarter of a century ago, and say a little about the role that freedom played in the forms of governmentality that I termed ‘advanced liberal’.

Governing through freedom

We have innumerable discussions of what Michel Foucault spoke about when he spoke about practices of freedom, whether he had a naturalistic or individualistic

conception of freedom, or a purely negative conception of freedom as absence of domination, his ideas of freedom versus those of other philosophers and so on (Dumm, 2002; Tobias, 2005). In my own analyses of the politics of freedom, my concern was different: it was about freedom as an operational element in particular regimes of knowledge, power and ethics, about freedom as embodied in historically specific practices. And I suggested that governing through freedom, in this sense, required difficult ethical evaluation, which certainly was not possible in terms of a binary of freedom vs. domination.

When the languages of freedom came to the fore in the revolutions of government in the Global North in the 1980s, we could begin to discern what freedom meant, not as a term of resistance – as in the struggles against apartheid in South Africa (depicted in the 1987 movie *Cry freedom*) or in the former Soviet dominions of Eastern Europe – but as a set of practices for governing. Overarching and underpinning these practices was a notion of freedom framed in a specific way: in terms of the ‘autonomy’ of the individual. Autonomy here had a paradoxical quality. It was portrayed as a *natural* desire of all humans, that is to say, something that is naturally sought by each human being, and hence does not need to be artificially inculcated. Yet, despite that, it seemed that autonomy did not automatically spring into being: various socio-political arrangements and ethical rectifications were required to create and sustain autonomous subjectivity⁷. In part, this was a matter of undoing some of the social arrangements that had accreted over previous decades, and thus releasing individuals from the shackles of dependency, and the social webs spun by the state and its agencies. In part, it was a matter of ablating the subjective consequences of those arrangements, in which individuals, confronted with all sorts of problems in living, looked to authorities for resolution. Thus individuals were to be made free, indeed to be *required* to live their lives, and narrate their lives to themselves, as if they were the results of acts of choice among alternatives offered, shaped only by personal preferences and interests. Once all those artificial constraints were removed, and their dire subjective consequences were remedied, the extent to which any individual was able to realize this natural autonomy was constrained only by the amount of time, effort or capital they were prepared to invest in achieving it.

The ethic of autonomy was thus an activist one, and individuals had to be activated to engage their own energies in their management of their lives and the improvement of their conditions. Unemployed persons were to become job seekers, refugees were to become asylum seekers and so forth, but more generally, we were all to become seekers after something: self-realization, self-promotion, maximization of our health, our bodies and our lifestyles through consumption. Freedom thus demanded a very particular ethic of the self-tied to specific practices and technologies. We were as free as the birds on the wire of whom Leonard Cohen wrote – I chose my title on the day he died: like birds on the wire trying in our way to be free. It was not so much that we were freed, but that we were ‘obliged to be free’ – to try, in our ways, to be free, to imagine our life as a kind of enterprise created by acts of free choice, to assume our responsibilities as free consumers, freed to take control of choices from reproduction to nutrition in the marketplace of options offered to us, freed to acquire many new responsibilities for our travails through private insurance for health and old age... And the irony was that we were to believe that we must do all this in the name of our freedom.

At least one of the reasons why I preferred the term ‘advanced liberalism’ to neoliberalism was that this obligation of freedom arose as a reaction to the many criticisms of states of welfare from the left and liberals as well as from those, such as Hayek and Friedman, who explicitly espoused a new liberalism. The technologies used to reshape social arrangements – the new public management, the partial transformation of previously socially provided public goods such as health, insurance or education into quasi-markets, and their new forms of management by budgets, audits, standards and the like – were not inventions of neoliberals, the Chicago boys or any one ‘thought collective’. Certainly Hayek’s *Road to serfdom* and *The constitution of liberty*, Friedman’s *Free to choose*, and Becker’s ideas about human capital suggested a range of possibilities – notably a celebration of market-like relations as the place where there is freedom to choose, to maximize one’s financial or human ‘capital’, in a domain of competition which, when fully realized, achieves optimal outcomes for all. And there may indeed have been formal and informal contacts between these and other intellectuals. But the strategies and technologies developed and

implemented were a kind of *bricolage*, some old, some new, some re-purposed, some merely re-described, but together forming a new way of thinking about individual and collective conduct and trying to govern it, an array of strategies that were certainly heterogeneous, but with enough of a ‘family resemblance’ to be grouped under a common name.

Recently, much has been made of the apparent novelty of the popular theorists of nudge technologies, and their liberal paternalism which argues, to put it crudely – don’t direct people to do things, but shape the ‘choice architecture’ to make it easier for them to make the choices that authorities consider desirable (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008; Whitehead *et al.*, 2014). But there is little new here. Those who would govern have almost always aimed to shape the choices of ‘free’ individuals in such ways; our freedom to choose was always shaped, managed and governed by others, whether those be marketers, professional experts, lifestyle gurus or politicians. Perhaps this was most obvious when, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and again today in China, we can see that to make up a ‘free society’ requires a whole range of new technologies and their associated experts: for example, censuses to provide demographic information on the individuals who comprise the nation, or public opinion polls to ‘take the pulse’ of the nation and determine the will of the free people, etc. To govern a free people it is necessary to *know them*, so that one can create the delicate but crucial affiliations between individual aspirations and governmental objectives.

Governing in the name of freedom, replacing the administrative welfare state and the visible hand of authorities required, did not just require a ‘rolling back the state’ and deregulation. The creation of quasi-markets everywhere from health care to education required an activist state to create the conditions of these notionally free markets and those who would populate them. Indeed, given the many failures of strategies of central control to even know, let alone manage, what was happening in notionally state-run entities, whether these be railways or hospitals, the New Public Management strategies for ‘governing at a distance’ significantly extended the capacity of authorities to govern notionally free organizations and enterprises by measures such as audits, budgets, standards and the like.

Constructing a 'free market' entails a variety of interventions by accountants, management consultants, lawyers and industrial relations specialists and marketing experts in order to establish the conditions under which the 'laws of supply and demand' can make themselves real, to implant the capacities, competences and ethical technologies of entrepreneurial selves, seeking to maximize their own 'human capital' through acts of choice, to embed the ways of calculating and managing that will make economic actors and organizations think, reckon and behave as competitive, profit-seeking agents, to turn workers into motivated employees who will strive to maximize their own potential in and through work, to generate the means to consume those goods or other things that maximize their quality of life; hence to transform everyone into consumers who will regard consumption freely chosen in the light of personal preferences as a way of meeting and maximizing their very own aspirations. That entails changing educational practices to inculcate the attitudes and values of enterprise, changes in television programmes from soap operas to game shows to implant the desire for wealth creation and personal enterprise (Ouellette & Hay, 2008), as well as the activities of marriage guidance consultants and a host of other psychological therapists to sort out the difficulties that arise when personal life becomes a matter of freedom of choice (Binkley, 2011).⁸

When most critics think of neoliberalism, however, it is economic 'freedom' that is uppermost in their minds, in particular 'deregulation' – the removal of domestic constraints to the freedom of circulation of capital and of goods and services. Across most countries in the world – though not all – in a series of radical changes to stock markets, border controls, international standards regimes and the like, finance capital was freed from many local constraints, roaming freely to invest wherever conditions were believed to be conducive to the generation of greatest profits. Capital was thus to be freed to constitute and exploit an imagined borderless world of global financial trading. Of course, capital was highly mobile in the context of colonialism, think only of the East India Company, but now production of goods from shirt buttons to motor vehicles was freed to move, as capital was invested in factories and industrial plant wherever the costs of machinery, rents and labour were lowest, and greatest profits could be made. Local and national 'protectionist' constraints, such as those

that protected certain industries thought to be of national significance, or protected and supported farmers or other sectors of the labour force, were to be dismantled. Goods and services as well, albeit to a lesser extent, were also freed by various international treaties to roam across national borders, though the world was never quite as flat and borderless as some popular representations suggested (Friedman, 2005).

Some analysts emphasize the benefits that have been achieved, arguing that the ‘expansion of global trade has rescued millions from abject poverty. Foreign direct investment has often been a way to transfer technology and know-how to developing economies. Privatization of state owned enterprises has in many instances led to more efficient provision of services and lowered the fiscal burden on governments’ (Ostry *et al.*, 2016, p. 38). But even those who supported these policies recognize that they have increased inequality in the Global North, and that the migration of capital to the places where production of goods and the provision of services was cheapest – to sweatshops and factories in China and Malaysia, or call centres and IT support to India – has had dire consequences for the industrial workforce in the Global North, especially in the peripheries of Europe and in the rust belts of the United States. As the same time this freedom of migratory capital has exacerbated the challenges posed by migratory labour – in particular, the movements of those who refused to accept their geographical bad luck in being born in the wrong place (Kearns & Reid-Henry, 2009). Thus ‘globalization’ can now be reframed as a dire threat to the vital security of one’s own national population. All this is, of course, very well-known. However, as we also know, problems of one strategy of government are the opportunities for another – and in this case the opportunities have been seized by one particular style of political thought which – to redeploy the term developed by Stuart Hall in another politico-historical context – I term ‘authoritarian populism’ (Hall, 1985).

Post-neoliberal rationalities?

Now, of course, there is a large literature on populism, on what it is and is not, on whether it is or is not the enemy of democracy, or the inescapable shadow of democracy and so forth (Fraser, 2016; Müller, 2016; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Kaltwasser *et al.*, 2017).⁹ Most agree on one thing – that while populism takes

many forms, all populist movements are grounded in the growth of disappointment, despair and sometimes rage at the machinations of governing bodies and the elites that control them. It grows from the belief that those institutions and elites live in a world of their own, that they forget or ignore the plight and the will of the people they are supposed to serve, and that the answer is to create a new and direct relationship between those who are ruled and those who rule, bypassing or at least supplementing the 'representative' technologies of parliamentary type democracy.

Nonetheless, despite these common themes, some argue that the populism of Trumpism, Wilderism, Le Penism and the like is simply a cynical attempt to harness these discontents for their own political ends. That they articulate opposition to the status quo does not amount to a strategy for governing, but is seen as essentially pragmatic and incoherent, latching on to whatever grievance they can find among a throng made up of those who feel aggrieved, dispossessed, ignored, almost a minority in their own land. Typically critics say that the constituency for such appeals is largely made up of angry white men with limited education who seek someone to blame and someone to articulate that blame: the liberal consensus of experts and elites, with their snobbish disdain for those who lack the refinements of their class; their political correctness, which betrays the true people, their cronyism which undermines their democratic credentials; their part in a system that systematically advantages them and their kind; their cosmopolitanism, which embraces every shade of identity apart from that of their own true population.

So why have I adopted the term 'authoritarian populism' for this kind of politics? Of course, Stuart Hall developed this concept in a radically different 'conjuncture' in the Britain of the 1980s, in part by re-jigging Nicos Poulantzas's idea of authoritarian statism (Poulantzas, 1978): 'popular consent', Hall argued 'can be so constructed, by a historical bloc seeking hegemony, as to harness to its support some popular discontents, neutralize the opposing forces, disaggregate the opposition and really incorporate some strategic elements of popular opinion into its own hegemonic project' (Hall, 1985, p. 118). Thatcherism, as he termed it, and the new right more generally, paradoxically combined an apparent opposition to the powers of the extended state, as in its attack on the welfare state, with an

appeal to the people. But in this configuration, the people were not summoned for popular mobilization, but to place their faith in a powerful leader who stands for their values and who will, in his or her turn, reconstruct the terrain of politics, of the ‘common sense’ of politics, along the lines of their own ‘spontaneous’ beliefs. Thatcherism, here, was an internally contradictory phenomenon which ‘managed to stitch up or ‘unify’ the contradictory strands in its discourse - the resonant themes of organic Toryism – nation, family, duty, authority, standards, traditionalism, patriarchalism – with the aggressive themes of a revived neo-liberalism – self-interest, competitive individualism, anti-statism’ as he put it in an earlier piece called ‘the great moving right show’ (ibid.: p. 122, citing Hall, 1979).

Now I am not suggesting a ‘return to Gramsci’ or a revival of the themes of ideology and hegemony. But I am suggesting that there are similar themes in today’s ‘authoritarian populism’ which ‘stitches together’ some themes that resonate with a particular disaffected constituency with the idea, not of a strong state, but of a strong and seemingly powerful leader who will not be bound by the prevailing common sense of politics – who will precisely try to create a new ‘common sense’. In asking whether this is more than political rhetoric, my aim (which was the aim of Stuart Hall, and the aim of the work I did with Peter Miller to operationalize the analytics of ‘governmentality’) was to suggest that progressives might have something to learn about the conduct of political contestation by taking seriously the form of these arguments, and their challenge to the common sense of ‘the left’ (Miller & Rose, 1990; Rose & Miller, 1992; some of the early empirical papers are now collected in Miller & Rose, 2008). Our analytics of governmentality aimed to identify – though not to celebrate – the inventiveness in politics that had been achieved by those political forces that we termed ‘advanced liberal’, an inventiveness which I, at least, found lacking in both traditional and radical strategies of ‘the left’ (Rose, 1999a).

We argued that such an analysis could productively focus on two dimensions – political rationalities and governmental technologies. Let me say a few words about each. First, rationalities: We argued that political rationalities had three defining characteristics. They had a *moral form* in that they were underpinned by a belief in the proper ends of the government of conduct – freedom, justice, equality, mutual responsibility, citizenship, common sense,

economic efficiency, prosperity, growth, fairness, rationality and the like – and in the proper distribution of powers and duties between authorities in that enterprise – what was proper for the state, for the market, for the church, for the family, for the individual. They had an *epistemological* character, in that they were based on a particular conception of the *domain* to be governed – society, the nation, the population, the economy – and of the *persons* over whom government is to be exercised – members of a flock to be led, legal subjects with rights, children to be educated, a resource to be exploited, elements of a population to be managed. And they were articulated in a distinctive *idiom*, a language that was more than rhetoric, but – however irrational and incoherent it may seem to those who think that speech does, or should, take a consistent and reasoned form – was an *intellectual technology*, an apparatus for rendering reality thinkable in such a way that it is amenable to political deliberations. Political rationalities, that is to say, are morally coloured, grounded upon knowledge, and made thinkable and practicable through language.

Now if we were, for a moment, to take seriously – and indeed literally – the arguments of the authoritarian populists, we would see that the ends of government were not formulated in terms of freedom, or even of prosperity, but in terms of greatness, pride, identity; of we, the people, a sense of our worth in the world, with many symbolic acts to mark that greatness – a greatness under threat, demeaned, disrespected, not just by our enemies but even by those who have governed us in the past, who have failed to give our identity its true name. So government was to be exercised in the name of ‘the people’. But who speaks for the people? We cannot rely on those political elites, with their cosy cabals and endless committees, with their comfortable lives in the corridors of power ‘inside the beltway’ or in ‘Westminster’: they have abandoned their duty to speak in the name of the real people, the true people. Indeed, we cannot rely on the state machinery to reform itself, so that it does once more align with the values of those true people, for it has been captured by the bureaucrats and their experts. No, some fearless individual, somehow immune to the blackmail of convention and the lure of the elite, is required to speak for the people. It does not matter if he or she does or does not come from the people: that is not the issue. The issue is that they recognize the people as the true source of moral authority, and hence of

legitimate political authority. They accept, they commit themselves to the fearless articulation of the will of the people. I love the people, and they love me – I do not ‘represent’ them, as if they cannot speak for themselves, I speak their words. However much you intellectuals sneer at my speeches and you politicians snipe at the twists and turns in my policies, my words are their words and my wishes are their wishes. Not ‘we, the people’ but ‘I, the people’, as Robert Singh puts in in the title of his ‘deflationary interpretation of populism’ (Singh, 2017).

A kind of epistemology follows from this moral valorization of ‘the people’, for ‘the people’ do not consist simply of all those who happen to inhabit a territory, but only those who form part of that moral community of the people, who share a history, who have common values, who stand for an identity. They are hardworking, resilient, down to earth individualists, who strive to manage the lives of their families, often against the odds using their own resources, helped out – spontaneously, no thanks required, I’d do the same for you – not by any state or public authority, but by their neighbours. And they are nationalists in the sense that they recognize that ours is the country where their values are valued, they are at liberty to pursue their ends in these ways, and, if necessary, they are prepared to defend it against those who deride or subvert it. Thus, those values and beliefs operate as the basis to make the distinction within the population, in order to recognize those who are not the people – whether asylum seekers who don’t share our values, or welfare recipients, who are parasitic on us, or liberal intellectuals who, in their stupid wisdom and in the name of abstract principles of civil rights, defend all minorities, with all values, however inimical they are to those that made our country what it is. Some might object to the suggestion that this is an epistemology, but I think it is: it is a theory of the nature of political subjects, of the subjectivities and the ethical values that are to be governed, those in whose name one is to govern; which also enables one to know those who are either of no concern to government or an active threat to it. And, as I will suggest later, there are some important consequences of such an epistemology of the true people.

As for a distinctive language, well this speaks for itself. A distinctive language is not a coherent discourse, but a set of repeated and recognizable elements, phrases and aphorisms that make aspects of the world thinkable in a way that points to remedial action. For example, at a recent Marine Le Pen rally,

‘[w]hen Franck de Lapersonne, an actor and FN supporter, told the rally that 19th century writer Victor Hugo "did not learn Arabic at school and that makes me happy," he received the loudest ovation of the day, with the crowd chanting the party's trademark slogan 'On est chez nous' ('This is our country!')’¹⁰. 'Our country', 'take back control', 'Make Ruritania great again' – we see here again and again the centrality of the idea of a nation state, its identity, its history and destiny, its population as an imagined community of values, the firm exclusion of all those who challenge or otherwise do not accept that identity; our ‘people’s home’ – as they term it in the Nordic countries – is not open to all. So, take back control in the name of the people, control by the true people, for the true people.

And, of course, this gives rise to a simple test to identify those who are not of the true people: a patriotic commitment to the values that constitute our national identity. As Theresa May put it in her speech to the Conservative Party Conference just after becoming leader, and, of course, in the wake of a referendum in which about half of those who voted supported the United Kingdom leaving the European Union 'If you believe you are a citizen of the world, you’re a citizen of nowhere’:¹¹ the cosmopolitan deracinated intellectual may claim to speak for an enlightened global citizenship of human rights and equality, but in reality speaks only for a small privileged elite whose misguided beliefs – the belief that their beliefs and values are rationally irrefutable and universal – are a fundamental threat to the territorialised, particularised, nativist values and beliefs of ordinary working people. These intellectuals are no patriots; they – and the experts who support them, even the judiciary – are ‘enemies of the people’.¹²

What, then, of freedom? At first glance, the language of freedom seems to play little part. Yet a language that resonates with freedom is deployed to defend the right and the authority of the people to ‘stand up courageously for the real values of our country’ and hence to be intolerant of those whose values threaten our values. To this freedom, to 'live free or die' as it is put in the official motto of the State of New Hampshire, the new authoritarian populism gives the name of liberty.¹³ The true people are not really a community or a *Gemeinschaft* of conformity; on the contrary, they are rugged individualists who speak their mind, without being constrained by the effete niceties of political correctness,

multiculturalism, etc. Indeed those doctrines, and the policies that enact them, may justify themselves in the name of civil liberties and the like, but are, in fact, a threat to liberty in the name of freedom. No wonder the US conservative libertarian website, *The Liberty Conservative*, headlined its edition of 25 August 2016 *Farage and Trump show the Liberty Movement how it's done*.¹⁴ Liberty here is not a liberty of 'anything goes' but the liberty of American, or British, nationalism against all those 'reprehensible international bureaucrats' who entangle the nation in a web of alliances and treaties, and ensnare it in the grasp of international bureaucracies such as the United Nations and superbanks such as the International Monetary Fund. Thus, Farage – as a story in the *Daily Telegraph* in March 2014 put it: 'When he speaks of liberty, he does it with a certain something in his voice and a glint in his eye'.¹⁵ Also at stake here is, of course, the liberty of thought, for the so-called freedoms of multiculturalism, with their political correctness and their thought police actually cede power to the enemies of liberty. But, of course, it is radical Islam which is now the exemplary enemy of liberty. For Wilders, Islam is incompatible with freedom: freedom is equated with personal liberty, the hard won liberty that 'we' gained by freeing ourselves from religions dominion over us.¹⁶ Le Pen's manifesto, presented at the rally just mentioned, begins with a promise of liberty: 'L'objectif de ce projet est d'abord de rendre sa liberté à la France et la parole au peuple. Car c'est en votre nom, et pour votre seul bénéfice, que toute politique nationale doit être menée' ['The aim of this project is first of all to restore liberty to France and to the people, for it is in your name and for your own benefit that all national policies must be carried out'].¹⁷

What is at stake, then, is a matter of liberation, a kind of internal decolonization, of liberating the voice of the real people, doing justice to those whose voice has been ignored and forgotten when it has not been ridiculed and despised. A commitment to defend – or restore – the culture of the real 'hard working' down-to-earth people. This celebration of the supposed values of the people thus differs from the earlier neo-con arguments about demoralization and dependency and their conception of an underclass subjectivity weakened and poisoned by liberal welfare and lack of authority (Cruikshank, 1998). And, indeed, it is epistemological in a second sense, related to that described above, in

that it concerns the source of valid knowledge. For knowledge is not to come from the experts with their arcane languages, their supposedly scientific calculations that have so often proved wrong, their demeaning of ‘common sense’. On the contrary, to see is to know - the knowledge that is to inform this rationality is the knowledge that ‘everyone knows’ – that comes directly from the experience of the real people, undistorted, unmediated by experts – one is reminded of Andrew Barry’s analysis of the epistemology of certain protest movements in his book *Political machines* (Barry, 2001). In the good old days of Swampy the ecowarrior who chained himself to trees, those protesting against the driving of new roads through fields and forests did not bring in experts to support their case – they brought the press along to the woods to see the corpses of the once magnificent trees and the wounded and despoiled earth torn up by bulldozers. Just look, they said, you can see this is wrong - to see is to believe.

Post liberal governmental technologies

In the schematic of governmentality that we developed to analyze ‘advanced liberalism’, Miller and I argued that *governmentalities* were not just mentalities, not just styles of thought or rationalities. On the contrary, to become governmental, such thought had to become technical, to link itself to *governmental technologies*: the complex of mundane programmes, calculations, techniques, apparatuses, documents and procedures through which authorities seek to embody and give effect to governmental ambitions. Political thought becomes governmental when it can link itself to a technology that seems to provide a means of realization – though, as I have already mentioned, one that usually is ‘congenitally failing’; that is to say, it fails to live up to the ambitions of those who try to construct it. From this perspective, we can see that the ‘advanced liberal’ premise of freedom – as at the same time a natural state, a universal desire, and something that had to be created and fostered by authorities, did answer to these demands of rendering itself technical and linking itself to technologies for the conduct of the conduct of individuals, collectivities and organizations. However, it generated a whole range of ‘failures’ of which perhaps the most troublesome related to the freedom of circulation of finance capital,

goods, services and people – often summed in the discontents with ‘globalization’ and the new problematics of security. If the failures of one way of governing are the opportunities for another, can these feature of authoritarian populism make themselves technical, are they linked to the emergence of post ‘neoliberal’ technologies of government?

For reasons of space, I just want to focus on one issue – security. It is a cliché that all liberal democracies struggle with the balance of liberty and security. Observing increased border checks, demands for advance passenger information for flights, enhanced visa regulations and so forth – not to mention Trump’s ill-fated travel ban, and border wall,¹⁸ we might be tempted to think that it is simply that the balance has now swung to security. We know that many of these measures are more symbolic than effective; for example, many similar measures were already in place at the time those responsible for the attacks on the twin towers in September 2001 entered the United States. But in authoritarian populism, the key here is the idea of ‘control’, as in the much-mocked slogan – ‘take back control’ – that was so much in evidence in the campaign for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. For if the price of liberty is eternal vigilance,¹⁹ then control seems to promise a way of actualizing that vigilance, rendering vigilance technological. Control manages to fuse the demand for liberty and the demand for security, and to give this fused objective a technical form.

Security in welfare states referred both to security of health, income, pensions and housing – that is to say internal *social* security - and to external territorial security. In these new styles of thought, the division between internal territorial security and external territorial security is re-posed in a new and actionable way. In his lectures on *Security, territory and population*, Michel Foucault distinguished two strategies of security: centripetal and centrifugal (Foucault, 2006). Centripetal mechanisms aim to circumscribe a closed space of operations, and try to regulate everything within that space, establishing norms, operating according to the principle of the permitted and the forbidden, and taking up the smallest infraction and trying to control it. For centrifugal mechanisms however – which Foucault take to be central to ‘the game of liberalism’, '[n]ew elements are constantly being integrated: production, psychology, behavior, the ways of doing things of producers, buyers, consumers, importers, and exporters,

and the world market' (Foucault, 2006, p. 45). Security, here, involves allowing the development of ever-wider circuits: 'An apparatus of security...cannot operate well except on condition that it is given freedom, in the modern sense [the word] acquires in the eighteenth century: no longer the exemptions and privileges attached to a person, but the possibility of movement, change of place, and processes of circulation of both people and things' (Foucault, 2006, p. 48).

Discussing contemporary developments in the context of biosecurity, Filippa Lentzos and I argued that such centrifugal mechanisms did indeed underpin security strategies in 'advanced liberalism' (Lentzos & Rose, 2009). These strategies did not seek to enclose and delimit, but to govern open circuits, planes of movement of persons, commodities, information. In part, they worked not by means of fixed criteria, but by charting patterns and regularities in flows across these planes, identifying potential threats on the basis of stochastic variations that match patterns identified as suspicious. And crucially, they aimed to govern by instrumentalizing subjective states to ensure the vigilance required to secure security.

The security strategies being proposed in the new authoritarian populisms depart from this approach. All the 'populists' of this persuasion agree on the need to reorganize the border, and to do so in terms of a new racist biopolitics of the nation. The centrifugal aspect of circulation that relates to freedom of movement of both capital and of persons is reframed in terms of a 'centripetal' strategy of security. Economic flows, or at least flows of goods, are to be subject to sets of specified norms of the permitted and the forbidden – or at least heavily taxed – in an attempt to secure its economy for its people. And the flows of persons are to be subject to a racist grid of possibilities and restrictions to secure the people against their enemies.

As far as persons are concerned, these centripetal mechanisms do not merely repeat the biopolitical racism of the eugenic period, where it was a matter of inferior races proliferating, reproducing their kind and weakening the character or constitution of the race. Even in the case of Trump's 'extreme vetting' it is not a matter of the vitality of the population, or at least not directly. To redeploy a term I first proposed some years ago, though it never really caught on, we may

say that it is an ‘ethopolitical’ form of biopolitics (Rose, 2000). By ethopolitics, I mean ‘attempts to shape the conduct of human beings by acting upon their sentiments, beliefs and values – in short, by acting on ethics. In the politics of our present ... the ethos of human existence – the sentiments, moral nature or guiding beliefs of persons, groups, or institutions – has come to provide the ‘medium’ within which the self-government of the autonomous individual can be connected up with the imperatives of good government. If ‘discipline’ individualizes and normalizes, and ‘biopolitics’ collectivizes and socializes, ethopolitics concerns itself with the self-techniques by which human beings should judge themselves and act upon themselves to make themselves better than they are’ (Rose, 2007, p. 27).

In contemporary authoritarian populism, this takes the form of a politics of identities, the ethical forms attached to the different races and their religious affiliations, their values, habits, personal practices, and their sexual relations. Such an ethopolitics does have an economic dimension, not that this was unknown in the early twentieth century, with all those cunning and money-grabbing Jews and so forth, who worked all hours and enriched themselves at our expense. Today, we can see an internally contradictory confection of concerns about the economic security of the people on the one hand – outrage about the illegals, the low paid workers, who undercut our own decent hard-working folk – and on the other, outrage about the costs to welfare of these racial outsiders, whose excessive breeding produces large families and thus place large demands on our precious welfare systems, yet who have never contributed to the people’s home which they now happily exploit: they are in it but not of it. And this is coupled with a biopolitics of race, framed not merely in terms of links between certain racialised religious groupings and the risk of terrorist violence, but more generally in terms of a conflict of values, between our true people whose identity is threatened by those from outside with different values – not necessarily deemed inferior, but sometimes merely radically distinct from ours – and also those who, because they challenge such an identity in the name of the pluralism of values and of cosmopolitanism – are indeed the moral enemy within, enemies of the people. This is ‘ethopolitics’ with a vengeance.

However, there are differences, especially between Europe and the United States. In Europe, the social principle remains strong among the new authoritarian populists. Each of the European authoritarian populist parties make a commitment to their people – the true Finns, the real Danes, the authentic French and so forth – to maintain, even to enhance, certain of the policies and practices commonly associated with the left. Thus, for example, the True Finns, who defend Finnishness as a set of values and a national identity, support a strong welfare state; support a strong educational system which will promote this cultural identity; support a tax system in part because it emerges from symbolizes and guarantees the solidarity and unity of ‘the people’. But all this is only for the True Finns. Indeed, from this perspective, it is the costs to the state of those who are not ‘the true people’ – those outsiders and enemies within – which are responsible for much of the austerity that has radically undercut welfare provision, coupled with new modes of individualization, responsabilization, outsourcing and the valorization of work; subjected so many to absurd tests of employability, rendered welfare payments discretionary rather than as of right, and transformed welfare recipients into scroungers. Hence for those others, when they have not already been denied access to the territory, and where they cannot be expelled, access to those rights and benefits should be denied or limited: those are only for the real people who have created the people’s home, and for whom that people’s home is intended to be home.

The need for security, here, is not simply a matter of insecurity: in this way of thinking, we are not so much ‘insecure’ as ‘vulnerable’ – our daily lives are vulnerable, our values are vulnerable, our people are vulnerable, our nation is vulnerable – we live in a state of pervasive vulnerability. In the face of this vulnerability, we need to draw upon, celebrate and enhance the individual and collective *resilience* of our people, resilience which was, for so long, and for many, threatened by over-reliance on the state and public authorities for protection. Hence we see the emergence of a range of new strategies and technologies for inculcating, enhancing and celebrating resilience that I have described elsewhere (Lentzos & Rose, 2009). More significantly, as I have suggested, in the name of securing liberty within enclosed territories, we are seeing the reactivation of centripetal mechanisms, framed in terms of ‘control’. A

new set of strategies is set in place, which are re-spatialising and circumscribing the national territory and seeking to know and to control as much as possible within that space, perhaps now not simply in terms of rigid norms and simple distinctions of what is permitted and what is forbidden, but in terms of a certain bandwidth of liberty. While in previous times, centripetal mechanisms always ran up against the problems of knowledge, of how to *know each and all*, perhaps today, things are different, at least in the imagination of the authorities. The dream of perfect knowledge of a population left at liberty becomes possible with the surveillance of cyberspace, the tracking not just via webcams but via smartphone operations, credit and debit cards, twitter use, Facebook and the like, creating virtual identities for each of us, that can be mined by algorithms, fuelled by machine intelligence to search for known patterns, and then ‘red flagged’ by algorithms for the attention of authorities. Here liberty is twinned with control, in the negative sense of management and constraint of unwelcome persons, actions, flows or events. We know when it fails only too well, but we also occasionally glimpse how well it succeeds.

Post neoliberal governmentality?

As I have said, I don’t much like the term ‘neoliberalism’ which has become a catch-all both to describe or explain and to condemn almost everything one does not like about our present conjuncture – from the planet of slums for which Mike Davis blames neoliberalism (Davis, 2006), to the epidemic of loneliness, eating disorders and self-harm in the United Kingdom which George Monbiot blames on neoliberalism.²⁰ All too often, to adapt an aphorism from another context ‘Neoliberalism... in addition to being itself and the result of itself, is also the cause of itself’ (Davis, 2006).²¹ Against the convictions of these critics of neoliberalism, who seem so certain about what has happened and what is happening, I would urge some caution: when political theorists of the future look back on our age, it is not clear what new configurations of authority, truth and ethics they will identify as having emerged at the end of the twentieth century, and what happened to them in the first half of the twenty-first century. But I began these reflections with the question of freedom, so let me conclude by

considering what has happened to freedom – is this still the question which might lead us to the heart of these new rationalities, or has it been reduced to a mere rhetorical device?

Perhaps one way to think about this is to reflect on the distinction between governing through freedom and governing in the name of liberty. No doubt it would be a mistake to believe that etymology could resolve the issue for us: there are many more or less scholarly arguments that point to the fact that the words used in English have different roots: liberty from the Latin, freedom from the Germanic. If one consults the Oxford English Dictionary, the definitions and usages of the words freedom and liberty intertwine, frequently referring to one another. Nonetheless, as Hanna Pitkin (1988) has argued, while the difference between freedom and liberty is subtle and shifting, it is there – at least for speakers of English.²² From my own perspective, if we consider language less for what it means than for what it does as an ‘intellectual technology’ in particular contexts of usage, we can perhaps see that freedom has a subjective dimension that is lacking in liberty (except in phrases such as ‘taking a bit of a liberty’!) Governing through freedom, that is to say, entails a set of practices that instill, shape and support a specific form of selfhood, in which each individual is to construct and construe their life as the outcome of notionally free choices, surrounded, instructed and cajoled by an array of little experts of the psyche. But, as Pitkin puts it, governing in the name of liberty implies ‘something more formal, rational, and limited than freedom; it concerns rules and exceptions within a system of rules. It concerns neither objects, incapable of rule-governed conduct, nor the depths of the psyche from which spontaneity springs. At most ... it implies firm, rational control of those mysterious depths and of the dangerous passions found there, not their expression in action. In other words, although liberty means the absence of (some particular) constraint, at the same time it implies the continuation of a surrounding network of restraint and order’ (Pitkin, 1988, p. 543). It is true that to live in liberty requires each of us to govern our passions and our will. As Mill stressed in his Introduction to *On liberty*, this is a condition of civilized self-conduct (Mill, 1859; see the discussion in Valverde, 1996). But the passions and will have to be controlled, not to engender the desires of choice and the aspirations of self-realization that became associated with

freedom in the 1980s, but in order to enable the citizen to conduct him or herself in liberty, in a political environment of laws, regulations and controls²³.

Governing through liberty, then, rather than in the name of freedom. Does any of this matter? I think it does, not just because we find a certain, perhaps ephemeral, version of a post-neoliberal governmentality in the rise of authoritarian populism. But more because, if previous mutations in governmentalities are anything to go by, we might well expect elements of these new governmentalities to spread beyond their initial confines, and to be incorporated within the rationalities and strategies of those who oppose these populists. Liberty, security, control – perhaps somewhere in the new relations among these terms – not in the realm of semantics but in political strategies – we might find the clues to the regimes of government that are emerging ‘after neoliberalism.’ Perhaps those on the left, rather than deriding them, might do well to explore the grounds for their emergence, and their potential for progressive re-articulation. In the mutations that are under way, while we may be at liberty, we undoubtedly remain ‘birds on the wire’. But we are no longer obliged to try, in our way, to be free, but to hope to live in a controlled world where our vulnerabilities are understood and managed, and where we can experience a kind of security.²⁴

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Notes

¹ This paper was prepared as a talk for a Conference on 'Freedom after neoliberalism' held at York University in the United Kingdom in June 2017 – this is the reason I revisited my earlier work on freedom. Thanks to Dr. Adam Kelly and Dr. Alex Beaumont for inviting me, and Harriet Neal for assistance with logistics. I have made some revisions in the light of very helpful comments from those who attended, and from the editors of *Economy and Society*, but have followed their advice and kept the style of a spoken talk, and kept references to a minimum. The title mystified many. Did I not realise, someone remarked, that we live in a wireless world? But for those who, like me, grew up with Leonard Cohen's voice, I hope the sense will become clear: I chose it on the day his death was announced.

² Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nsVxEZNIJpI>

³ I discuss my reasons for preferring this term in *Powers of freedom* (Rose, 1999b): in part this was because the strategies that emerged from the mid-1980s onwards were heterogeneous, certainly not a 'realisation' of the ideas of neoliberals, and incorporated many elements from radically different political rationalities. Markets remain regulated, governments remain interventionist, technologies for governing have been invented – for example, those involving 'governing through communities' (Rose, 1996) – which were never dreamed of by any of the original neoliberals, nor by the Chicago economists, or by proponents of the 'Washington

Consensus’. Rajesh Venugopal has provided an excellent recent critical analysis (Venugopal, 2015). My reservations remain, despite some critics feeling vindicated by the fact that the International Monetary Fund has recently published an article that uses this very term to characterize a rather more limited set of policies – ‘increased competition—achieved through deregulation and the opening up of domestic markets, including financial markets, to foreign competition [and] a smaller role for the state, achieved through privatization and limits on the ability of governments to run fiscal deficits and accumulate debt’ and to argue that some of the effects of these policies, such as increased inequality, are actually inimical to growth and should be addressed by policy makers (Ostry *et al.*, 2016) – see <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/aug/18/neoliberalism-the-idea-that-changed-the-world>

⁴ There is, of course, a very long debate in political philosophy about the history and meaning of freedom. My concern however, is with what one might term the ‘operative philosophy’ of rationalities and strategies for the conduct of conduct. While these sometimes draw upon elements of these debates, they never merely ‘express’ them, and are never reducible to them

⁵ We could probably add Turkey’s Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party to this list, though the idea of liberty seems rather foreign to him. Justice, however, as Thomas Osborne has pointed out, is indeed a recurrent theme in populist discourse – and all sorts of authoritarian measures are often justified in the name of justice for those who have been denied justice, while at the same time, those very populists are often accused of subverting justice.

⁶ This was the title of the conference at which I was speaking, hence the quote marks.

⁷ When I was working on this issue, I was particularly struck by Hayek’s discussion in the third volume of *Law, legislation and liberty: The political economy of a free people*: ‘Man has not developed in freedom ... Freedom is an artifact of civilisation ...Freedom was made possible by the gradual evolution of the discipline of civilization which is at the same time the discipline of freedom’ (Hayek, 1979).

⁸ In this context it is interesting to note the rise of the ‘psy’ professions in China, and the development of what some have termed ‘therapeutic governance’ (Yang, 2015; Zhang, 2017a; Zhang, 2017b).

⁹ Since I wrote the lecture on which this paper is based, *Economy and Society* has published a number of ‘deflationary’ analyses of populism (Molyneux & Osborne, 2017; Thompson, 2017). While I have learned a lot from these discussions, as will be seen, I take a rather different approach, and have maintained the original argument in my lecture here.

¹⁰ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-election-fn-idUSKBN15J007>

¹¹ The full speech is available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/10/05/theresa-mays-conference-speech-in-full/>

¹² This was a rather infamous headline in the *Daily Mail* on 22 August 2017, over an article expressing ‘Fury over “out of touch” judges who have “declared war on democracy” by defying 17.4m Brexit voters and who

could trigger constitutional crisis' <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3903436/Enemies-people-Fury-touch-judges-defied-17-4m-Brexit-voters-trigger-constitutional-crisis.html>

¹³ Although he did not quite put it in these terms, this was the message of Donald Trump's campaign speech at Liberty University in May 2017: <http://time.com/4778240/donald-trump-liberty-university-speech-transcript/>

¹⁴ <http://www.thelibertyconservative.com/farage-trump-show-liberty-movement-done/>

¹⁵ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/ukip/10731266/My-six-months-with-normal-Nigel-Farage.html>. Farage's UK Independent Party is described by some as an ultra-libertarian party (Hayek, 1979, p. 163; italics removed), but of course 'libertarianism' has as many shapes as populism; Farage's own ideas about liberty can be gleaned from articles such as this one in the *Daily Telegraph* in March 2014.

¹⁶ Some excerpts from Wilders' speeches can be found at https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Geert_Wilders.

¹⁷ <https://www.marine2017.fr/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/projet-presidentiel-marine-le-pen.pdf>

¹⁸ Despite Trump making so much of his pledge to 'build that wall' in his campaign, a lot of the US-Mexico border is already walled or fenced (over 1/3 of the nearly 2000 miles). The barrier was enhanced under both the Bush presidencies, under President Clinton, and much of the fencing was actually installed during Obama's presidency, under the Secure Fence Act, 2006, signed by George W. Bush. That seems to be fact, not fake news....

¹⁹ This phrase is often misattributed to Thomas Jefferson, but may, or may not, come from a speech to the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society made by the American Abolitionist and liberal activist Wendell Phillips on January 28, 1852: <http://www.thisdayinquotes.com/2011/01/eternal-vigilance-is-price-of-liberty.html>

²⁰ see Monbiot, G. (2016). Neoliberalism is creating loneliness: That's what's wrenching society apart, *Guardian*, 12 October.

²¹ Roberts was referring to the use of the word 'stress'.

²² For instance, neither French nor German has this distinction. In her compelling scholarly discussion of the etymology of the two terms, Pitkin also takes her distance from Hannah Arendt's discussion of the relations of freedom and liberty.

²³ Hence, of course, the argument that one sees again and again in colonial discourse, and in debates over the liberation of slaves, that some are incapable of these forms of self-government, and so are ill-suited for life at liberty.

²⁴ Thanks to Diana Rose for suggesting this formulation.