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NATIONALIST POLITICS AND THE DOUBLE MOVEMENT: THE PROBLEM OF LEGITIMACY IN NEOLIBERAL STATES

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INTRODUCTION

Culture, we have been told, is back. From academic proclamations of a "cultural turn" in the social sciences to the tearful hand wringing of pundits bemoaning the rise of culture politics as a sign of some coming end, the notion that culture, in some form, has become increasingly powerful is nearly cliché. More than simply anecdotal, however, cultural politics – specifically, an increased efficacy of monolithic nationalist politics – has come to play a much more prominent role in the governance of many respective states.

Once derided as arcane, the contemporary resurgence of monolithic nationalism appears to have increasingly tangible electoral benefits. In cases ranging from the *Front national* in France, to the True Finn Party in Finland, to the sustained success of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey, political authority and monolithic cultural legitimation initiatives have proven effective. The superficial implication is, of course, that this is somehow unique to the contemporary era. Commenting on the role of Christianity in American politics, Domke and Coe argue: "Religion has always been a political subtext in the U.S., but in the past few decades the salience and strategic use of religion have become ascendant in a manner not seen before in modern American political history" (2007: 54).

This paper is an examination of this trend; specifically, focusing on the rise of nationalist politics as a causal outcome of the effect neoliberalism has on the legitimacy of actual and potential state actors. While the claim that a facet of so-called globalization has motivated this rise in cultural politics is certainly not new, the tendency has been to emphasize the rise of identity-centered movements in relation to the declining authoritative role of the state. Put simply, the state is commonly viewed as an extraneous or decreasingly relevant institution having been superseded by transnational capitalism or the increased power of national movements.

In contrast, I argue that the state remains an authoritative socio-economic institution with the caveat that the ideological dictates of contemporary globalization have altered the legitimation strategies of advanced capitalist states. As neoliberalism becomes increasingly hegemonic, the economic regulatory and social protectionist capacities of respective states are reduced. Within the double movement of course, such state-led socio-economic protections play a fundamental mitigating role. The reduction in actual or perceived capacity to satisfy economic protectionist demands can certainly have a diminishing effect on the national legitimation of offending state actors and institutions.

As Marxian state theory reminds us, a (if not the) primary state function is the maintenance of positive social conditions for capital accumulation. Polanyi goes further in basing his understanding of the state on the fact that capital accumulation can neither legitimate itself nor sustain any semblance of balanced resource distribution. Therefore, the role of the Polanyian state is to mitigate these adverse conditions through redistributive socio-economic protectionism. This emphasis on protectionism emerging from countermovement demands is of course essential, but incomplete without a similar recognition of the state's role as a protector of capital accumulation. In the words of Block and Somers: "...the state acted in the interests of society as a whole when it passed protective legislation, and yet the same was true when it passed pro-market laws; it clearly did not 'belong' to either of these forces" (1984, 68).

In the current era of neoliberal hegemony, this dual legitimation of the state is increasingly altered to privilege capital accumulation. The obvious problem from a Polanyian perspective is one of popular acquiescence within a seemingly unbalanced double movement framework. For some this represents a fatal flaw in Polanyian state theorizing; I disagree and argue that the

double movement not only remains a valuable analytical framework, but also enhances our ability to explain the proportional rise of neoliberalism and nationalist politics, if the latter is understood as a mechanism of state legitimation.

This essay argues that the double movement, albeit slightly reconceptualized, offers an analytical opportunity to examine the use of monolithic nationalism as a strategic means of neoliberal state legitimation. To this end, it is necessary to first establish a conceptual definition of "nationalist politics" and offer analytical support for the presence of such a phenomenon. The second forthcoming section articulates a Polanyian theory of the state and the role of countermovement economic protectionism as a fundamental means of maintaining legitimate authority. The final section examines how a reconceptualization of the double movement offers an opportunity to understand the role of nationalist politics in facilitating state legitimacy despite the raw promotion of capital accumulation.

1. THE RISE OF NATIONALIST POLITICS

Any operational definition engaging either nationalism or cultural politics will run the risk of omission. The term "nationalist politics" is itself hopelessly vague and must be defined within a specific context. Accordingly, any operational definition hoping to examine the nexus of state legitimation and cultural political strategies must be state-centric. This bias is reflected in the use of the term "nationalist" as opposed to the movement-oriented focus on "cultural politics." While this is certainly not a critique of the concept (cultural politics) or corresponding analyses, it is an attempt to return attention to the active role of the state. This conceptual narrowing is limiting, but intentionally so. Therefore, nationalist politics is defined here as the strategic integration of monolithic cultural rhetoric and symbols as a means of acquiring or maintaining legitimate political authority from strategic constituencies.

Conceptualized in this way, nationalist politics is certainly nothing new. Anderson (1983) and Gellner (1983), for instance, identify early efforts to legitimate European nation-states through national rearticulations of local cultural norms. The monolithic character of traditional nationalism, including emphases on normative cultural majorities, was identified by Renan (1882) in his classic text. It is only recently (and in limited cases) that notions of post-Enlightenment nationalism have shifted to more pluralist or cosmopolitan definitions of national cultural identity. The argument made here is simply that neoliberal globalization facilitates the reemergence of monolithic nationalism, not that this is somehow historically novel. The question then becomes, what has changed to enable such a revival?

Two approaches have largely defined inquiries into this contemporary resurgence. The first is movement-oriented and emphasizes a broad shift towards identity and cultural mobilization resulting from structural changes in post-war advanced capitalism. Inspired by Touraine's early inquiries, many scholars subsequently observed a decline in class-oriented mobilization in favor of *new social movements* based on cultural affinity and issue-orientation. The state, from this perspective, is commonly understood as an impediment and mobilization, as well as action, is designed to circumvent traditional political institutions. Castells, for instance, argues that: "contemporary nationalism is more reactive than proactive... more cultural than political, and thus more oriented toward the defense of an already institutionalized culture rather than toward the construction or defense of a state" (2004, 33).

The second is a complementary perspective that focuses on the development of global political economic integration (i.e., "globalization") as a causal mechanism facilitating cultural mobilization. Sub-state sovereignty efforts centered on distinctive cultural claims – Quebec,

Scotland, Catalonia, for instance –have been enabled as globalization processes reduce traditional state controls and create opportunities for autonomous participation (Giddens (2003: 13), Guibernau (1999: 19), and Keating (1996)). Others, such as Held (1995: 48-9) and Moore (2008), observe a retreat from cosmopolitan definitions of national identity resulting from adaptations in state responsibilities due in part to global political economic integration. From either vantage point, the contemporary efficacy of cultural politics is best explained through relative state decline.

Habermas and Yúdice are more explicit in their identification of neoliberal ideology as the mechanism of such decline and facilitator of cultural ascendancy. Key to each scholar is the decline of traditional economic regulatory and protectionist capacities, once central to state legitimation. According to Habermas (2001, 51): "The nation-state has fewer and fewer options open to it. Two of these options are now completely ruled out: protectionism, and the return to a demand-oriented economic policy." He is even more explicit in his connection between state decline and the ascendancy of reactionary cultural nationalism: "Our own prosperous societies are witnessing a rise of ethno-centric reactions against anything foreign...The loss of solidarity touched off by issues of redistribution can lead to political fragmentation. (*ibid*, 71-72).

Yúdice certainly agrees that neoliberalism has negatively affected state economic protectionism; however, he is even more explicit in arguing that these changes have somehow made culture more politically utilitarian. The retreat of the state is not an accident – neither is the increased integration of respective cultural forms as means to achieve political economic ends: "The imbrication of culture with economics and the solution of social problems is a conjectural phenomenon analogous to the Keynesian compromise between capital and labor brokered by nation-states" (2003: 284).

Clearly, state decline, prompted by increasing neoliberal pressures for entry into the global economic system, is identified as the causal link between globalization and the rise of national cultural mobilization. The problem is that many state theorists (see Evans 1997; Scholte 1997; Weiss 2003) offer substantial evidence that the state has maintained its socio-political authority despite retrenched protectionist capabilities. Clearly, advanced capitalist states no longer maintain the same characteristics that once defined the embedded liberal era – but neither have they been relegated to institutional obscurity. From the perspective of scholars like Habermas and Giddens, as well as from a Polanyian theoretical perspective, this reduction in protectionism should result a decline in popular legitimation. Neoliberal states have worked to privilege capital, but does this also mean that neoliberal states are less viable as institutions of social authority?

The issue at hand here is one of legitimation. As countermovement protections wane, the adverse costs of neoliberalization are transferred to national populations and promises of political reversal are viewed with increasing skepticism. The result is a significant challenge: How to meet national popular demands for social protection from the adversities created by an increasingly unregulated capitalism, while at the same time being either unwilling or unable to meet these demands through economic means. As previously mentioned, neoliberal state legitimacy cannot be maintained through traditional countermovement strategies based on economic protectionism. State parties and actors seeking legitimacy while also confronting the market fundamentalism inherent in neoliberal ideology, are encouraged to employ alternative (i.e., non-economic) means of meeting countermovement demands.

A Polanyian understanding of the state is central to this analytical framework. At once an institution in support of capital accumulation and growth, yet also one tasked with mitigating accompanying socio-economic adversities – the Polanyian state is in a relatively contradictory

position. It can accomplish neither without the legitimate authority to act in such a mediating fashion. In the postwar era, such legitimacy came through national economic expansionism – on the back of the Bretton Woods monetary system – and a distinctly economic means of addressing the systemic inequalities of capitalism. As the following section illustrates, *economic* strategies for meeting countermovement protectionist demands were central to both the Polanyian analytical model as well as the compromise era of "embedded liberalism." The question remains whether neoliberal experiments with non-economic legitimation strategies are sustainable in satisfying protectionist demands borne of economic disparities.

2. PROTECTIONISM AND THE ROLE OF THE STATE

The double movement is, put simply, a description of the relationship between systemic economic forces and national populations. As liberal capitalist ideology pervades local economic practice, an unfettered and unregulated version of capitalism creates hardship conditions that elicit a national popular reaction through the development of a "protectionist counter-movement." The promise of "self-regulation" is, of course, a fallacy in practice – capitalism, itself, cannot regulate its systemic excesses nor can it legitimate itself in the face of requisite inequalities and hardships. The institution of the state was therefore developed to provide such legitimacy at least partially through the redress of systemic inequalities. In Polanyi's words: "...no purely monetary definition of interests can leave room for that vital need for social protection, the representation of which commonly falls to the persons in charge of the general interests of the community – under modern conditions, the governments of the day" (Polanyi 2001, 162).

The key issue here is the relationship between protectionism and legitimacy. While emphasis in the double movement clearly illustrates an economic bias towards social protectionism, it is essential to recognize the converse relationship between capital accumulation interests and state legitimation. As a state unable to meet national protectionist demands will lose popular legitimacy, so too will the state that neglects the interests of capital. It is therefore necessary to understand protectionism as a function of the dual legitimation interests of a mediating state. This clearly distinguishes Polanyi from many state theorists and certainly informs his more functionalist understanding of capitalist social stabilization (see Dale 2010, 78-79). More to the point, it highlights Polanyi's understanding of capitalism as being unable to regulate itself and ensure its own sustained health.

Przeworski (2001) offers a similar observation of capitalist dependency on the state; put simply, accumulation can only be sustained within a context of legitimacy. Capitalism necessitates inequality (von Mises 2000[1955]; Lipset 1959; Lowi 2005), which certainly discourages support from non-beneficiaries. The potential withdrawal of popular support from labor market participation or consumption could certainly have deleterious effects. The state is therefore required to maintain the popular legitimacy of capitalism through the mitigation of its negative effects (Przeworski 2001: 67-8).

The implication, of course, is that some sort of equilibrium must be maintained for both capitalism and respective states to remain viable. This has encouraged some to dismiss such conclusions in the face of stark imbalances between the power of financial capital and state regulatory capacities. This critique is somewhat reflective of Searcy's argument that Polanyi overstated the potential of the countermovement, particularly, "his [Polanyi's] contention that the protective response erodes state support for the market and for the needs of the capitalist class" (1993, 220). Indeed, the plethora of evidence pointing to exacerbated wealth inequality, regulatory decline, and social service retrenchment would imply that the equilibrium implied in the double movement is far from observed reality. If, in fact, the contemporary neoliberal era has

eroded the capacity of state economic protectionism while at the same time facilitating capital dominance, is a Polanyian conceptualization of the state salvageable?

I argue that not only is it possible to maintain a Polanyian analytical framework of the state, but that in doing so we are well-positioned to understand the link between neoliberal/market hegemony and nationalist political efficacy. The crux, I contend, resides with the strategic legitimation of the state and the very imbalance of economic power that many have used to minimize the potential viability of Polanyian state theory.

3. THE NEOLIBERAL STATE AND THE CRISIS OF LEGITIMACY

That counter-movement demands could be satisfied through economic protectionism served as the foundation for the classical double movement. Contemporary neoliberal ideology however, weakens this alternative. David Harvey succinctly summarizes these changes as they have emerged empirically: "As the state withdraws from welfare provision and diminishes its role in arenas such as health care, public education, and social services, which were once so fundamental to embedded liberalism, it leaves larger and larger segments of the population exposed to impoverishment" (Harvey 2005: 76).

The decline of the Keynesian welfare state is a well-known story and one that has precipitated the ubiquitous notion of state decline. It is essential though to recognize this shift as both a decline in state economic regulatory capacity and a commensurate increase in the affective structural power of transnational financial capital. If the decline of embedded liberal protectionism is a function of state decline, it was the result of the state facilitated rise of financial capital. Or as Barrow puts it, states are, "principle agents of globalization" (2005: 123).

As state-led neoliberalism succeeds in fulfilling its objective of "liberating" capital from the "constraints" of regulation, we are left with a significant problem. Global capitalism requires authoritative states to maintain local acquiescence and amenable market conditions; however, satisfaction of capital interests is insufficient to maintain national legitimacy. The result should be, of course, a "crisis of legitimacy" in which widespread dissatisfaction with the ability of states to meet economic protectionist demands results in a relative decrease in popular legitimacy.

In fact, it is possible to claim that there is evidence for such popular delegitimation. Anecdotally, we can certainly look to recent popular mobilization in Tunisia and Egypt as examples of such delegitimation. In a more general sense withdrawal of support for a particular state party or actor is certainly a sign of diminished electoral legitimacy. The problem is, of course, that these shifts rarely result in counter-hegemonic outcomes. An electoral shift from one neoliberal actor to another does nothing to resolve the structural adversities created by unregulated capital accumulation. So how can a neoliberal state actor or group maintain legitimacy without the will or means of addressing conditions of economic disparity that motivate counter-movement demands? Put another way, is it possible for neoliberal state actors to acquire legitimacy from national populations it is actively failing to protect? Or to put it another way, how can state actors maintain legitimacy while encouraging constituents to act against their economic self-interest?

The questions are, of course, rhetorical. State institutions and actors can be both neoliberal and maintain popular legitimacy – one need only look to constituent support for Republican Party actors in the United States or the widespread support for the AKP in Turkey. More to the point, the double movement framework highlights the need to identify an alternative legitimation strategy as neoliberal actors eschew economic protectionism. The contemporary efficacy of nationalist politics must therefore not be understood as a function of state decline, but rather as

an integral mechanism for the maintenance of neoliberal state legitimacy.

While the long-term sustainability (and, to the point, desirability) of such culturally oriented legitimization strategies is tenuous, I would argue that the inherent contradictions of neoliberal capitalism make this one of the few strategic means available for obtaining or sustaining neoliberal state authority. Through this lens then, the manifest link between neoliberal states and monolithic nationalist politics appears proportional. This of course highlights a system in crisis – economic inequalities can never be resolved through cultural means, particularly the superficial and often- fictitious affinities promoted by respective nationalisms. Viewed this way, the integration of monolithic forms of cultural legitimization may provide short-term political gain, but at the cost of exacerbated economic inequalities and the potential of instigating ethno-cultural conflicts. Faustian, indeed.

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