Rethinking (De)Politicisation in Liberalism: Macro and Micro-Political Perspectives

Abstract

The traditional literature in depoliticisation studies has treated depoliticisation chiefly as a technique of modern governance. This chapter suggests that more attention needs to be paid to the ideological/structural character of this tendency. Following a critical analysis of Colin Hay's linear model of (de)politicisation, it provides a structural explanation for (de)politicisation dynamics through a philosophical engagement with Michel Foucault's and Karl Polanyi's discussion of liberalism. This macro-level of analysis is then supplemented with a micro-perspective of the (de)politicisation dynamics through the Michel Foucault's notion of counter-conduct and the Derridian cyclicalness of power. The largely poststructuralist approach in this chapter ultimately aims to expose the conceptual ambiguities and contradictions that lie underneath the simple and clear-cut understandings of depoliticisation and repoliticisation.

Introduction

In British political science, Colin Hay's analytical model of (de)politicisation is highly influential (Flinders and Buller 2006; Wood and Flinders 2014; Kuzemko 2014). Hay (2007) constructs levelled linear models of politicisation and depoliticisation in order to make sense of the way certain issues are (de)politicised from one level (e.g. governmental) to another (e.g. the private sphere). Politicisation signifies the promotion of certain issues from a realm of necessity or a lower level of politicisation (public sphere) to a higher one (the governmental sphere). Hay's understanding of politicisation in turn reflects his understanding of politics, as "the realm of contingency and deliberation" (Hay 2007, 79). Hay's conception of politicisation is not only applicable to contemporary examples of politicising certain issues or questions – it also carries a historical dimension of application. For example, Hay demonstrates how the questioning of the authority of the Church and religious taboos, and the role of scientific advancement in secularisation, can be understood as forms of politicisation (*ibid.*, 81). Depoliticisation, on the other hand, is taken to operate "in an analogous fashion to politicization – only in reverse" (*ibid.*,

82). Therefore, depoliticisation entails the demotion of issues, which were before in the realm of the governmental sphere and highly political/politicised, to a lower sphere (non-governmental/public, private sphere or the realm of necessity).

Having briefly presented how Hay schematically maps out processes of (de)politicisation, I will now present two points, broadly speaking, where I find Hay's analytical understanding of (de)politicisation processes problematic and lacking in theoretical substance. The first notable tendency in Hay's analysis of (de)politicisation is the neutralisation of these processes from their ideological and systemic context. In his engagement with various and well-chosen examples of (de)politicisation, whether it is "the consciousness-raising" of new social movements (*ibid.*, 81), addressing the practice of smacking of children at the governmental level (*ibid.*, 82), privatisation of state assets in 1980s UK (*ibid.*, 83) or tackling environmental degradation through consumer choice preference-shaping (*ibid.*, 85), Hay demonstrates the analytical usefulness of the proposed linear model of (de)politicisation. However, by eliminating from analysis the ideological and systemic aspects of different issue areas and processes, Hay simplifies and neutralises the issues under consideration from the context of the ideological process and power relations that condition and shape them. Although he acknowledges the role of neoliberalism and public choice theory in the depoliticising tendency of politics in the last few decades (*ibid.*, 150 - 152), Hay's analysis becomes problematic when the effects of public choice and neoclassical economic assumptions are situated solely at the level of perceptions, be it those of the voters, the wider public, the media or the politicians. This in turn informs his view of an individual's raison-d'être behind the use of depoliticising strategies and discourses. Individualising the causal relationship between these assumptions and depoliticisation omits from analysis the systemic and ideological processes that set the path for the depoliticising tendency in contemporary politics. In other words, such an account does not explain how and why depoliticisation emerges in the first place. While we can appreciate the importance of describing and mapping out the perceptions held by different segments of society, we cannot hope to fully understand these widely held dominant perceptions without tracing them to their ideological and systemic sources. In the following, I will endeavour to show how this can be done. It has to be noted that my analysis is much less analytical in its descriptive aspects and more philosophical in its engagement with the terms that concern scholars in both political science and political philosophy.

The first part of my analysis will demonstrate how depoliticisation cannot be understood without addressing its ideological principles and situating it within the wider governmental rationality that guides it. By drawing upon Michel Foucault's genealogical analysis of liberal

governmentality and Karl Polanyi's concept of "the double movement", I will demonstrate the role liberalism plays in reshaping democratic politics through two key depoliticising mechanisms, that of the market and the juridical-institutional framework. The next part of my chapter will illustrate the dynamic relationship between repoliticisation and depoliticisation. Instead of following Hay's distinctive linear model of (de)politicisation, I will instead propose to think the dynamism between repoliticisation and depoliticisation in a cyclical fashion at two different levels: (1) the macro-political level and (2) the micro-political level. In order to avoid simplifying and strictly delimiting repoliticising and depoliticising processes within comfortable single-issue cases, a macro-political outlook of the dynamism will map out the teleological trajectory of repoliticisation in relation to depoliticisation by relating it back to liberal governmentality and the counter-force it currently faces in the form of social movements and new populist political parties. To illustrate the micro-political level, I will draw upon Michel Foucault's concept of counter-conduct and Jacques Derrida's understanding of the cyclicalness of power. I will argue that we cannot properly understand complexity of the dynamism without addressing the question of power in political struggles. The chapter will propose a nuanced conception of power, which integrates both repoliticising and depoliticising dimensions, by elucidating the relationship between its ephemeral and institutional forms of manifestation.

Situating depoliticisation in liberalism at the macro-political level

At the macro-political level of depoliticisation, we can observe continuing privatisation of state governance and public space, and a (de/re)-regulation of economic environment. The interweaving of the public and private has become so intricate over the last decade that it is increasingly difficult to launch an offensive for the protection of public provision of goods and services – who to address, who is responsible, through what channels and by occupying what spaces/grounds? Within the capitalist rationality, politics is recognised as an unpredictable, and potentially an antithetical, force which needs to be tamed in order to be made predictable, stabilised and neutralised. This gesture signifies what Burnham called "placing at one remove the political character of decision-making" in his much quoted definition of depoliticisation (Burnham 2001, 128). Open and democratic decision-making is replaced with the establishment of the technical infrastructure which transformed the previously (and directly) state-managed public services into a devolved and fragmented network of private contractors for the provision and delivery of goods. Moreover, I argue that parallel and congruent to this process, there is also a "socialisation" of population taking place through the biopolitical mechanisms of control

and supervision, such as statistical counting, alienation and individualisation. At the macro-political level, depoliticisation thus takes form in two different ways: political decision-making is outsourced to non-democratic and technocratic bodies, while at the broader level of society, citizens are shaped into individualised and apolitical consumers, easily controlled and manipulated by the dominant depoliticised narratives. Although the latter process is depoliticising in nature, it represents the reshaping and extending of state governance, contradicting the assumption of the diminishing and limited state in the era of globalisation.

Already in the early 1960s, Swedish sociologist Ulf Himmelstrand observed a transformation of politics from ideological clashes and debates to "a dull, technical discussion about means for promoting goals questioned by none" (Himmelstrand 1962, 83). Citing the pluralist political sociologist Seymour M. Lipset, he suggested "the triumph of the democratic social revolution in the West" (Lipset 1960, 406) prompted the question of whether we have reached "the end of ideology" in the West. When workers achieved "industrial and political citizenship", the conservatives came to terms with the importance of the welfare state, while the democratic left recognised that too much state power carries "more dangers to freedom than solutions for economic problems". This spelled the future of democratic politics void of ideological struggles (*ibid.*). Himmelstrand described this process of transformation as the *depoliticisation of politics*. For Himmelstrand, depoliticisation implied "a transformation of political *ideologies* into a set of more or less distinct administrative *technologies* based on a widespread consensus as to what kind of goals one should try to attain" (Himmelstrand 1962, 83). Unable to predict the stagflation of the 1970s, a period of high unemployment and high inflation, and the inability of Keynesian economics to end recession in the Western world, Himmelstrand and Lipset could not have known at the time that academics and scholars would be asking the same questions in the 1990s, with the turn to neoliberalism and the emergence of Third Way politics.

This leads me to the next question that I will be dealing with in this chapter, namely, what transformation liberalism as a governmental rationality went through to produce the effects such as the continuing depoliticisation of politics. What I find pertinent in Himmelstrand's formulation of depoliticisation is not the kind of distinct administrative technologies signify this transformation of politics, but the goals or ends depoliticisation is destined to serve. Following this line of inquiry, I will now turn to Foucault's genealogical analysis of liberal governmentality and Karl Polanyi's notion of the double movement in order to identify the main principles of depoliticisation in liberalism. This will demonstrate how the seemingly depoliticising processes at work are in fact bolstered by institutional mechanisms within the framework of the market

logic. The critical interrogation of the self-limiting principle of liberalism, popularly known as *laissez-faire*, will expose the paradox of these depoliticising tendencies that manifests itself in the parallel biopolitical extension of state control.

The paradox of (neo)liberalism: the dynamism between depoliticisation and politicisation at the macro-political level

As mentioned above, I place my analytical diagnosis of the depoliticising tendencies at work in contemporary society within the framework of what Michel Foucault argued was the dominant governmental rationality of "our age", that is liberalism. In his 1979 Collège de France lectures, Foucault set out to establish an alternative reading of government, as opposed to providing another theory of the state, which he saw was best described by the phrase the "art of government" or governmentality (Foucault 2008, 2). This was his methodological attempt to escape falling into the ontological fallacy of "all those universals employed by sociological analysis, historical analysis, and political philosophy", which are already constructed as given, and instead start from concrete practices of government to show how these universals "were actually able to be formed" (*ibid.*, 2–3) The art of government is accompanied by a particular rationality, Foucault continues, that pertains to a specific mode of governing or exercising power. The very point of coming up with this whole new concept in political theory is to show that the exercise of power, or politics, is not just in the domain of certain individuals, but that it represents the very plural condition of all co-existing thinking beings (Foucault 2009, 282). Politics or the actualisation of power manifests itself exactly when "the interplay of these different arts of government with their different reference points" (Foucault 2008, 313) unravels. In other words, what marks the political in (de)*politic*isation are the moments and sites of struggle between different governmental rationalities, or ideologies.

What, then, is the rationality that has guided the art of government in Foucault's times and still does today? From the 18th century onwards, Foucault reveals "this new type of calculation [that] consists in saying and telling government: I accept, wish, plan, and calculate that all this should be left alone" (*ibid.*, 20). This principle of liberal rationality has been popularised as l*aissez-faire* and signifies the contradictory self-limitation of government. It is through political economy that the possibility of limitation enters governmental reason (*ibid.*, 17). Foucault (*ibid.*, 17–18) observes the emergence of "political economy" from the middle of the 18th century, which marks the gradual establishment of "a reasoned, reflected coherence"

between practices that were once conceived as "the exercise of sovereign rights, or feudal rights", such as tax levies, manufacture regulations or regulations of grain prices, and were now managed by "intelligible mechanisms which link together these different practices and their effects, and which consequently allow[s] one to judge all these practices as good or bad" according to a new regime of truth (*ibid.*, 18). By the "regime of truth", Foucault meant the ensemble of mechanisms and discourses, particular to a specific point in historical time and space, that determine what counts as true and what as false. Here we might ask: what exactly is the new regime of truth that decides between right and wrong, true and false that Foucault was suggesting in relation to the emergence of political economy? According to Foucault, the point in which the liberal art of government distinguishes itself from the previous forms of government is that "its mechanisms, its effects, and its principle" (*ibid.*, 28) are becoming more intensified and refined around the regulative idea of frugality.[1] The principle of frugality represents the optimisation and rationalisation of governing under liberal governmentality, where the state self-limits itself, so that it does not govern "too much and too little" (*ibid.*, 19). The principles of frugality, self-limitation and laissez-faire are in this sense very closely related and can all be condensed as the key principle of classical liberalism: the self-limitation of the state with respect to the self-government of civil society. Foucault stresses that this idea of frugality dominating the art of government has not come out of "the heads of economists" (*ibid.*, 29), but the market. The "natural mechanisms" of the market act as "a standard of truth which enables us to discern which governmental practices are correct and which are erroneous" (*ibid.*, 32). Following the classical economic theory underpinning economic liberalism, the general direction and guidance of the government no longer functions "according to justice", but according to "the truth" of the market (*ibid.*). This truth is supported by expert scientific discourses (that is, professionalisation and standardisation of economics as a science and the accompanying developments in jurisprudence) and the institutions which produce it (university, the media, non-governmental organisations) (Foucault 1980, 131). To summarise, the organising principle of frugality means that it is no longer "unlimited regulatory governmentality" that takes over the "site of the formation of truth", but it is increasingly recognised that the market needs to "be left to function with the least possible interventions precisely so that it can both formulate its truth and propose it to governmental practice as rule and norm" (*ibid.,* 28). It is therefore this idea of an independent and self-regulating market that replaces the older idea of the market as distributive

[1] The principle of frugality gains a whole new dimension of significance in the last few years after the financial crisis of 2008, when the short period of Keynesian policy response is replaced by fiscally restrictive measures across the European continent, exemplifying the self-limitation of the state in relation to the market economy.

justice in the site of truth (*ibid.*). The blending of the new liberal governmentality and the market interests ultimately results in the market dictating and prescribing "the jurisdictional mechanisms" (*ibid.*) that regulate the milieu of market needs.

We can understand the delegation of the management of political economy from the domain of the sovereign (feudalism) to the purportedly natural mechanisms of the market as a process of depoliticisation. The naturality and expertisation of the market forces are key characteristics of depoliticising processes and discourses that Foucault identifies in his analysis of liberal governmentality. The mechanisms of the market can be said to be natural only through the production and use of expert and scientific knowledge (political economy/economics). They gain the quality of being natural and self-regulated only by being discursively constructed such. However, as Foucault underlines, this purported naturality is bolstered by state intervention at every step of the way in the political economy. Here it is also important to mention the significant role of positive law in regulating and neutralising the political for the purpose of maintaining the appearance of the self-regulating market. Establishing an institutionalised order which operates independently from the alleged arbitrariness of politics and which is able to regulate and arbitrate between rival and conflicting interests of the market is encapsulated by the liberal idea of the rule of law.[2] The rule of law provides the infrastructure for fulfilling the principle of frugality in liberal governmentality: the state representatives pass laws that recode and delegate political responsibility, bestowed upon them by a democratic mandate, to legal and para-legal arbitration bodies, which then in turn issue decisions in accordance with the principles of market efficiency. This is essentially a depoliticising act in practice.

During the post-war period, Foucault identifies a break with the tradition of eighteenth and nineteenth century liberalism, or rather its re-evaluation, in the development of (neo)liberal economic thought. While the principle of self-limitation in liberal governmentality is still followed, it is no longer pursued in terms of "the reciprocal delimitation of different domains" between the market economy and the government (Foucault 2008, 121). The market economy is no longer

[2] From a political Marxist perspective, Ellen M. Wood has written extensively on the separation of political and economic spheres of activity under capitalist hegemony. In her critique of liberalism, she argues that liberal democratic legal and political institutions make "possible the maximum development of purely juridical and political freedom and equality without fundamentally endangering economic exploitation" (Wood 1981, 181). For other written work by Wood on the transition from feudalism to capitalism and the relationship between liberalism and capitalism, see Wood 1983; Wood 1995; Wood 2002. When comparing Wood's and the more post-Marxist and sociological approaches to understanding the relationship between liberalism, capitalism and democracy found in this chapter, Wood's analysis is still very much firmly rooted in the Marxist tradition by emphasising the role of capitalism in shaping political institutions and society. My approach, alternatively, takes liberalism as the starting point for understanding the depoliticisation of governing, putting emphasis on the contingency of the institutional framework in political economy, while bringing together "the political" and "the economic" in my analysis.

professed to be governed by natural laws of the market. The market economy is also no longer seen as a delimited and independent domain from the liberal governmentality. The role of the liberal government is re-evaluated to the extent that the government must now accompany the market activity "from start to finish" (*ibid.*). While the axiom of liberal governmentality is still a functioning market economy, the market mechanisms are no longer external to the government, but super-imposed on it. The question of liberal governmentality is now what type of delimitation of government most effectively follows the market logic, which means that "the market is what ultimately must be produced in [and through] government" (*ibid.*)

Neoliberalism moves away from the typical laissez-faire approach of classical liberalism to its more "positive" form which encourages and even demands intervention from the governing bodies (*ibid.*, 133).. While the challenge for liberal governmentality was "how to cut out or contrive a free space of the market within an already given political space" (*ibid.*, 131), the challenge for neoliberalism is to infuse the very governmental rationality itself with market principles and interests. Similarly, neoliberal governmentality does not operate via intervening "on the mechanisms of the market economy" (*ibid.*, 138), but by modifying the very regulatory conditions (or tendencies) of the market. Let's take the examples of unemployment and independent central banking to demonstrate how this shift to neoliberalism is characterised by depoliticisation as its main strategy.

In the situation of high unemployment in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, the role of the state was no longer to let the market forces resolve the problem on their own through self-regulation, as it is stipulated by the classical economy theory (liberalism), nor did it involve direct policy intervention by the state with the aim of achieving full employment (Keynesianism). While the key operating principle of neoliberal governmentality is still self-limitation, this self-limiting proceeds in a way that optimises the operation of the market economy. Whereas under a social-democratic consensus the state actively intervened into the market economy in order to protect society and the workers against the inefficiencies and malfunctioning of the markets, the social policy under neoliberal governmentality is no longer concerned with questions of social justice:

> Whatever the rate of unemployment, in a situation of unemployment you absolutely must not intervene directly or in the first place on the unemployment, as if full employment should be a political idea and an economic principle to be saved at any cost. What is to be saved, first of all and above all, is the stability of prices. (*ibid.*, 139)

The stability of prices, or the inflation rate, becomes one of the key markers of good governance in a neoliberal state. Depoliticisation is the prime mechanism through which the optimisation of neoliberal governmentality can be achieved. Another illustrative example of depoliticisation of macroeconomic policy-making is the institution of central banking, operationally independent from the interference of the executive branch of government, which takes hold more prominently in the 1990s and 2000s across the global North. The transformation of the role of the central bank from an active interventionist tool of the state to balance macroeconomic disparities and protect productive economic sectors from excessive market fluctuations towards the mere pursuer of price stability demonstrates the neoliberal self-limiting of state governance.[3] When Mark Carney replaced the outgoing Bank of England (BoE) governor Mervyn King in 2013, he was contemplating flexibilising the inflation targets and fixing interest rates in order to influence increasing unemployment in Britain, which at the time reached 7,7%.[4] However, once in office, Carney made it very clear that the primary mandate of BoE was to eliminate any potential threats to price or financial stability, first and foremost, and not to intervene directly into the jobs market.[5] As Foucault reminds us, the role of the (neo)liberal governance is not to intervene on the effects of the market (*ibid*., 145):

> Government must not form a counterpoint or a screen, as it were, between society and economic processes. It has to intervene on society as such, in its fabric and depth. Basically, it has to intervene on society so that competitive mechanisms can play a regulatory role at every moment and every point in society and by intervening in this way its objective will become possible, that is to say, a general regulation of society by the market. (*ibid.*)

It is at this point that we can see more clearly the intricate interweaving of economics and biopolitical taming of society, what is probably most interestingly captured by Foucault's phrase that liberalism acts as "the general framework of biopolitics" (*ibid.*, 22). Foucault is very clear that we should not understand the (neo)liberal government as "an economic government", but

[3] For more on the independent role of central banks with respect to monetary policy, see Krippner (2007).
[4] See Larry Elliott (2012b), Angela Monaghan (2013) and Chris Giles and Patrick Jenkins (2013). For more on Mark Carney's macroeconomic positions upon his appointment, see the House of Commons Treasury Committee report (House of Commons 2013, Ev 3).
[5] Carney's speech to the 146th Annual Trades Union Congress (BoE 2014); Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne's guidelines to Mark Carney on definition of price stability and government's economic policy (HM Treasury 2014).

as "a government of society" (*ibid.*, 146); a society that is remodelled according to the market principles of competition and entrepreneurship, which translates into a constant drive for the pursuit of profitable (non)creativity and risk-taking: "It is a matter of making the market, competition, and so the enterprise, into what could be called the formative power of society" (*ibid.*, 148). Social policy that was intended to help the less fortunate is no longer there to counter the negative effects of the market operations, but to make "the formal mechanism of competition to function so that the regulation the competitive market must ensure can take place correctly" (*ibid.*, 160). If depoliticisation is the key mechanism of neoliberal governmentality in reshaping the relationship between the state and civil society, then biopolitics is its way of maintaining control over its subjects. This control is exercised through the insidiousness of governmental power, which combines both the visible disciplinary aspects of power, as well as the more positive, covert aspects in the form of the government of the self. Let me return to the example of privatised social policy under neoliberalism. Under neoliberal social policy, responsibility for one's economic situation lies with the individual and not the state, which minimises its role to protect the labour force against the negative effects of market competition. In such a society, it is the responsibility of every individual to work on their self-improvement. We are encouraged to be more entrepreneurial, innovative, flexible with our time, productive, be more competitive. In this way, neoliberal governmentality works on the politics of our biological lives and bodies in order to fit into the overall framework of a competitive market economy.

We, therefore, speak of the frugality of government under neoliberalism, and on the other, the extension of the biopolitical control of the state.. The socialisation of the public sphere that accompanies the depoliticisation of state governing, however, expands the biopolitical control of "citizens" and "members of society" who are counted, classified and grouped inside the whole that Foucault calls the population. Foucault (2008, 28) explains the effects of these contradictory developments:

> not without a number of paradoxes, since during this period of frugal government, which was inaugurated in the eighteenth century and is no doubt still not behind us, we see both the intensive and extensive development of governmental practice, along with the negative effects, with the resistances and revolts which we know are directed precisely against the invasive intrusions of a government which nevertheless claims to be and is supposed to be frugal.

Against this contextual mapping of liberal governmentality, we can understand what bolsters the depoliticisation of the state and the reconfiguration of the very axiom of politics (Rancière 1999, 2010; Mouffe 2000, 2005). In fact, depoliticisation is supported and sanctioned by decisions that are very much political – they are carried out by democratically elected representatives, whose mandate it is to serve in the interest of the general public, at least in theory. However, in line with the principles of neoliberal governmentality, they instead increasingly follow the needs of the market. This is demonstrated through the pursuit by neoliberal governments of policies that are detrimental to social cohesion and well-being in society, for instance, austerity measures and cuts to public spending, structural reforms of welfare and pensions schemes, privatisation and deregulation of corporate activity, and so on. In this way, the dominant governmental rationality of today, Foucault instructs us, recalibrates the general regulatory framework of society, so that it is modelled on a competitive order of the market (Foucault 2008, 140–1). Furthermore, through subjectification, it directs the members of a population, towards one specific mode of conduct, that of depoliticised and consumerist individuals, who need to be centered on constant self-improvement (Brown 2015). At the level of society, the (neo)liberal governmentality prompts the rearrangement and shifting of power from the politically accountable to the non-accountable, from the state to the para-state or non-state institutions, from “the political” to “the juridical” and “the technical”.

By way of illustration, the post-2008 wave of protest movements in the aftermath of the financial crisis can be given as one example of the dynamics of depoliticising processes at the macro-political level, which have prompted a repoliticisation of democratic politics. Anti-austerity protest movements and the new radical left political parties, from the Syntagma Square protests and Syriza in Greece, the Indignants and Podemos in Spain to the 2012–2013 People’s Uprisings and the United Left in Slovenia, have recently been the focus of different authors in the social movements and new radical left literature (della Porta and Mattoni 2014; della Porta 2015; Katsambekis and Kioupkiolis 2014; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014; Kioupkiolis 2015). The main purpose of this chapter is not to offer a descriptive account of these repoliticising forces but to consider them in relation to the underlying reasons of their emergence, namely the depoliticisation of formal politics and democratic procedures under neoliberal governmentality. In order to undertake this critical endeavour, I will first address the tension between depoliticisation tendencies and repoliticisation, spearheaded by the protectionist counter-movements. For this part of analysis, I will turn to Karl Polanyi’s dialectical understanding of “the double movement” to conceptualise the dynamism between the two opposing forces. I will then use Foucault’s concept of counter-conduct and Jacques Derrida’s

notion of violence of law as analytical prisms through which I will (re)think the dynamism between depoliticisation and repoliticisation at the micro-political level. This will help me elucidate the cyclical nature of the dynamism between depoliticisation and repoliticisation in more depth.

Dynamics of (re)politicisation at the macro-political level through Karl Polanyi's double movement

Like Foucault, Polanyi in his book *The Great Transformation* (2001) also explores the utilitarian logic of economic liberalism to explain the role of political institutions in creating the right conditions for the realisation of a self-regulating market economy. The latter, for Polanyi, was nothing but a fanciful, yet destructive idea (Polanyi 2001, 145–6). Where Polanyi's historical exposition of liberalism goes further than Foucault's genealogy of liberal governmentality is in coupling the depoliticising tendencies of liberal ideas with movements of repoliticisation. Namely, Polanyi observed that the liberal project of establishing a self-regulating market – an idea, which finds its intellectual basis in classical liberal thought – was met with considerable resistance from those social groups most affected. He captured the dynamics between these two movements in the term "double movement", whereas the monumental effects of this double movement were reflected in his phrase "the great transformation". Polanyi gives the example of the trading and emerging business classes, which supported the establishment of a self-regulating market and were resisted by the protectionist counter-movement of landed and working classes, the aim of which was to protect the social and natural life from the "deleterious action of the market" (*ibid.*, 138). The counter-movement – either in the form of material resistance (strikes, protests, labour movements) or regulation (political institutions and law – protected not only human and natural life, but also the very conditions needed for the organisation of the capitalist mode of production itself. For example, Polanyi talks about the role of central banks in managing the monetary system in order to "keep manufacturers and other productive enterprises safe" from the destructive effects of market liberalisation (*ibid.*). Polanyi also uses the example of the Chartist movement in the mid-19th century England which fought "for the right to stop the mill of the market which ground the lives of the people" (*ibid.*, 234). Reinforcing his critique of economic liberalism, Polanyi argued that "from Macaulay to Mises, from Spencer to Sumner, there was not a militant liberal who did not express his conviction that popular democracy was a danger to capitalism" (*ibid.*). The workers' Chartist movement thus

illustrates how repoliticisation emerged as a reaction to the depoliticising efforts of liberal governmentality.

Using Polanyi's dialectics of the double movement, we can understand how the destructive effects of neoliberal governmentality widened the gap between the rich and the poor and how the concurrent depoliticisation of the democratic processes of decision-making provoked the emergence of new protest movements in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis (Dale 2010; Silver and Karataşli 2015; della Porta 2015). The combination of worsened material conditions and the increasingly delegitimised political institutions provided fertile conditions for the emergence of a counter-movement. Here, a parallel can be drawn to the period of the original, first great transformation that Polanyi illustrated so vividly in his book. During the first great transformation in the 19 century, the economic liberal forces worked hard to quench the democratic aspirations of the working classes, until the negative effects of liberalisation became so destructive that the repoliticising counter-movements put in motion a double movement. The dynamics of the latter eventually resulted in the collapse of the 19th century civilisation and the rise of alternative economic systems, fascism and socialism. Some authors have suggested that we are currently witnessing another double movement of forces under the second wave of the great transformation (for instance, see Levien and Paret 2012; Burawoy 2013; della Porta 2015), which could explain why we are witnessing a revitalised dynamic between depoliticisation and repoliticisation in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. Following the institutional attempts at the depoliticisation of class conflict under neoliberal governmentality from the mid-1970s to the present day (Habermas 1976, 1987; Wolfe 1977; Offe 1985), political groups and movements seek alternative channels for the expression of democratic demands outside the established democratic institutions. This dynamic between institutional depoliticisation and extra-institutional resistance is exemplified by the tension in liberal democracy between liberalism and popular sovereignty, leading to the eruption of crises in political and economic governance as a result of the unsustainable systemic contradictions. The scholarly debate in the 1970s on the so-called crisis of governability in advanced liberal democracies demonstrates one such episode in the unravelling of systemic contradictions (for instance, see Crozier et al. 1975; King 1975; Sartori 1975; Simeon 1976; Parsons 1982), and we could argue that we are seeing another such crisis in contemporary times.

While the mainstream literature in depoliticisation studies treats depoliticisation mainly as a neutral mechanism to be used by governments for political convenience, my analysis demonstrates that placing depoliticisation within the wider ideological-institutional and historical framework of our political-economic system reveals its more profound significance for the health

of liberal democracy. What it demonstrates is that depoliticisation, as part of the wider (neo)liberal governmentality, delegitimises the institutions of representative democracy as it ignores the political character of social conflict and antagonism in contemporary societies. And, as representative institutions give way to the self-regulating market in determining the parameters of state action, the biopolitics of the competitive market order under neoliberal governmentality corrode the social cohesion between different communities and social groups.[6] We could argue whether these conditions are amenable to repoliticisation and the emergence of counter-movements, or whether they are more likely to lead to political passivity and self-resignation.

In the next section, I will look more closely at the cyclical dynamics between depoliticisation and repoliticisation at the micro-political level that starts to take shape in my macro-political analysis above. The purpose of this interrogative and theoretical exploration will be to expose the conceptual ambiguities and contradictions that lie underneath the simple and clear-cut understandings of depoliticisation and repoliticisation.

Dynamics of (re)politicisation through counter-conduct at the micro-political level

For the purpose of this section, depoliticisation will be understood in its formal institutional, or liberal democratic sense, and repoliticisation will refer to the extra-institutional and ephemeral form of radical politics. In post-Marxist literature, the relationship between institutional politics and radical politics (for instance, in the form of protest movements), has been covered in terms of conceptual distinctions *post-politics*/*the political* (for instance, see Mouffe 2000; Mouffe 2005; Mouffe 2013), *the police*/*post-politics* and *post-democracy*/*democracy* (for instance, see Rancière 1999; Rancière 2010). My aim in the following section will be to conceptually interrogate the dynamics between depoliticisation and repoliticisation at the micro-political level. I will do this through a theoretical unwrapping of Foucault's peculiar concept of "counter-conduct". By productively exploiting the ambiguity of the term, I want to forgo falling into the analytical trap of reproducing the entrenched binary between institutional politics and radical politics, while exposing the overlapping internal contradictions that each of them conceals. This analytical gesture will also help me address the perennial question of radical left politics in

[6] For literature on the fragmentation of social cohesion and political identities in post-fordist economy, see Bauman 1997, 2000, 2007; Boltanski and Chiapello 2005; della Porta 2015.

contemporary society: how can we extend and multiply the impact of political and protest movements in order to transform the depoliticised institutions of liberal democracy?

In his 1977–78 Collège de France lectures, Foucault coins the word "counter-conduct" to describe the resistant practices that emerged in the midst of the crisis of the Church in modern Europe. For Foucault, the key issue in this crisis was not the interplay between the Church and the state, but the relationship between the pastorate and governmentality (Foucault 2009, 191–3). Instead of using the more obvious terms, such as dissidence or resistance, Foucault comes up with the word "counter-conduct" for the benefit of its conceptual ambiguity (*ibid.*, 200–201). He does that in order to avoid the usually negative or reactive connotation of the word resistance. For Foucault, counter-conduct encompasses the dimension of domination or discipline, both in the political (conducting others) and ethical (conducting oneself) sense. The term "counter-conduct", therefore, retains the ambiguity of "conduct", but articulates a desire to be governed differently and thus offers a positive and alternative form of conduct, as opposed to merely resisting the dominant form of conduct in the negative sense of the term. Another way we can understand these actualisations of power or counter-conducts could also be in terms of repoliticisation. The key element that conduct and counter-conduct seem to have in common is the notion of power – in this sense they both represent the actualisation of power, but in different forms: one is constituent and depoliticising, the other is constitutive and (re)politicising. In the following, I will examine more closely the shared ontology between counter-conduct and conduct in order to better understand the dynamics between the two opposed forces. This will hopefully throw some light on why depoliticisation and repoliticisation need to be treated and studied together and not as two separate, isolated occurrences.

The close relationship between counter-conduct and conduct is evidently of great importance to Foucault as well. At the very beginning of the 1 March 1978 lecture, he asks himself the following rhetorical question:

> Just as there have been forms of resistance to power as the exercise of political sovereignty and just as there have been other equally intentional forms of resistance or refusal that were directed at power in the form of economic exploitation, have there not been forms of resistance to power as conducting? (Foucault 2009, 195)

Here, Foucault raises an interesting point about autonomist movements and strike actions, which he describes as conducting. By that, he means that they are not mere resistances to existing power structures, but also offer an alternative way of conducting. More specifically, in

relation to the Christian pastoral power in the Middle Ages, Foucault examines "how over a long period an internal crisis of the pastorate was opened up by the development of counter-conducts", which "were able to put in question, work on, elaborate, and erode the pastoral power" (*ibid.*, 202). He describes the crisis of the pastorate as a result of "an extreme complication of pastoral techniques and procedures", an institutionalisation, which led to "the development of a dimorphism, a binary structure within the pastoral field, distinguishing the clergy from the laity" (*ibid.*). With the growing disparities between the rights, obligations and privileges of the clergy and those of laity, with the privileged pastorate being "closer than other to paradise, heaven, and salvation" (*ibid.*, 203), pastoral revolts of conduct caused an internal crisis and the ensuing reformation of the pastorate. This analysis of the dynamics between pastoral conduct and counter-conducts can be translated to a more "general field of politics" or a "general field of power relations" (*ibid.*, 202). Extrapolating Foucault's account of pastoral power to our understanding of depoliticisation, the latter also involves the institutionalisation, professionalisation and elitisation of social and political power. Repoliticisation, on the other hand, poses a challenge to this exclusionary monopolisation of power, and presents an alternative way of conducting.

Having briefly presented the difference between conduct and counter-conduct, I will now focus on demonstrating the common ontology that they both share. This part of the discussion will mostly center on the originary and cyclical aspects of this commonality. Jacques Derrida's essay on the mystical foundation of law can be of assistance here. The paper, which he presented at the colloquium on "Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice" in 1989, notably draws upon the work of another thinker, Walter Benjamin (1996) and his essay *Critique of Violence*. Derrida's deconstructive analysis, through Benjamin, sheds light on the very relationship between depoliticisation and repoliticisation through the notion of "violence of law". Derrida maintains that law has a double nature of violence. He summons the conventional phrase in English, "to enforce law" (Derrida 1992, 5), which alludes to the force that accompanies the law. This force of law, or "mythic violence" (*ibid.*, 31), as Derrida also calls it, takes two forms in the paradigm of the state: (1) the first form, *law-preserving* violence, is the one generally known as positive law, which includes the enforcement mechanisms that conserve the dominant order of things and ensures its continued reaffirmation and maintenance; (2) the other form, *law-making* violence, captures the moment or the period during which law originates, founds and inaugurates itself in "performative and therefore interpretative violence" (*ibid.*, 13). What is remarkable in this observation is the transition, which is not actually a

transition, or at least not a marked and discernible crossing from one stage to another, from law-preserving to law-making violence. Rather, it seems there is “a more intrinsic structure” (*ibid.*) at play in the relationship between the two opposing forms of violence of law. This antagonism between the two modalities of the same structure, on the one hand opposed to each other, but on the other still one and the same, can be explored by turning attention to Derrida’s words in the following passage on the performative ontology of language and what he calls “the mystical”:

> Here a silence is walled up in the violent structure of the founding act. Walled up, walled in because silence is not exterior to language. It is in this sense that I would be tempted to interpret, beyond simple commentary, what Montaigne and Pascal call the mystical foundation of authority. One can always turn what I am doing or saying here back onto – or against – the very thing that I am saying is happening thus at the origin of every institution.

The aporetic structure of law-making/law-preserving violence is “mystical” in the sense that it covers up the violence of the originary act in instituting itself, according to Derrida, and I would argue the same could be applied to our understanding of the interaction between conducts and counter-conducts and depoliticisation and politicisation at the micro-political level. There is something about the dialectics between the two opposing forces that evades our interpretative, rationalising capabilities, in its very performative power. The law-making violence – for instance, in the form of state violence, civil war and coup d’état – is at times “uninterpretable or indecipherable”, but it is “certainly legible, indeed intelligible since it is not alien to law” (*ibid.*, 36). Another quote from Derrida that attempts to grasp the internal contradiction of power in the violence of law might be of help here:

> But it is, in *droit*, what suspends *droit*. It interrupts the established *droit* to found another. This moment of suspense, this *épokhè*, this founding or revolutionary moment of law is, in law, an instance of non-law. But it is also the whole history of law. *This moment always takes place and never takes place in a presence.* It is the moment in which the foundation of law remains suspended in the void or over the abyss, suspended by a pure performative act that would not have to answer to or before anyone (*ibid.*)

This exposition of the violence of law can offer some rich insight into the shared ontology between depoliticisation and (re)politicisation. Instead of seeing the two as a binary, we also need to acknowledge that they represent the two sides of the same coin, despite having different operational logics. While the first conserves and optimises the dominant order, whether it is neoliberal governmentality or the pastorate, the second intervenes and disrupts the first, prompting systemic backlash against the challenging force, but at the same time instigates its improvement and adaptation. In *The History of Sexuality*, as pinpointed by the editor of the lecture notes at the Collège de France, Foucault utters, "[w]here there is power, there is resistance", and continues: "and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Foucault 1978, 95). Resistances are not only "passive" or reactionary, neither they are simply "a promise that is of necessity betrayed"; rather, they "are the odd term in relations of power; they are inscribed in the latter as an irreducible opposite" (*ibid.*, 96). To further accentuate the ontological relatedness of depoliticisation and repoliticisation, one should consider Foucault's reflections on counter-conduct: "The analysis of governmentality /.../ implies that "everything is political." /.../ Politics is nothing more and nothing less than that which is born with resistance to governmentality, the first revolt, the first confrontation" (Foucault 2009, 217). At this point, it is worth briefly responding to two different kinds of critique that have been levelled against Foucault's conception of power: (1) the first argues that Foucault's idea of power can only account for the microphysics of power, while it fails to consider its structural form at the macro-level; (2) the second focuses on Foucault's insistence that power is everywhere, thus precluding the possibility of agency and resistance. In his work, Bob Jessop addresses the first critique by pointing to the evolution of Foucault's conception of power in his earlier work on "the micro-physics and micro-diversity of power relations" towards the macro-physics of power and its strategic codification in his later work where Foucault develops further the genealogy of governmentality (Jessop 2007, 140). The second critique can be found, for instance, in Peter Digeser's (1992) *The Fourth Face of Power* and Wendy Brown's (2015) *Undoing the Demos*. In response to the latter critique, I would maintain the notion of counter-conduct demonstrates that there is a productive locus of agency and resistance in the interstices between the micro-physics and macro-physics of power in Foucault's work.

Up until now, we have looked at different ways of conceptualising the aporetic relationship between conducting power and revolts of conduct, highlighting "the active sense of the word 'conduct'" (*ibid.*, 201) in counter-conducting individuals or groups, acting "in the very general field of politics or in the very general field of power relations" (*ibid.*, 202). There is also

another aspect of repoliticisation, which is often omitted from depoliticisation studies, an aspect that exhibits a more negative and less "constructive" side of (re)politicisation.[7] At the beginning of his 1 March lecture, Foucault writes (*ibid.*, 195–6):

> There is also the theme of the nullification of the world of the law, to destroy which one must first destroy the law, that is to say, break every law. One must respond to every law established by the world, or by the powers of the world, by violating it, systematically breaking the law and, in effect, overthrowing the reign of the one who created the world. /.../ The Western and Eastern Christian pastorate developed against everything that, retrospectively, might be called disorder. So we can say that there was an immediate and founding correlation between conduct and counter-conduct. (*ibid.*, 14)

What seems compelling in the above quotation is the profoundly negative and destructive form that counter-conduct can take. Counter-conduct, or repoliticisation, needs not to be conducive, in a "rational" manner, towards some positive alternative order of things, to some "better" way of conduct. Yet, it might also show how something destructive can be constitutive of something, an opening of the possibility for the emergence of a new conducting framework. [8]

This section has attempted to illuminate the dynamics between depoliticisation and repoliticisation by employing Foucault's distinction between conduct and counter-conduct in the first part and Derrida's exposition of the violence of law in the second. The analysis in both has shown how depoliticisation and repoliticisation share the structural element of conducting power through their actualisation. Power served as a fruitful analytical device to bring into discussion different manifestations of (de)politicisation, while emphasising the interplay amongst them. Although being deployed by different operational logics, depoliticisation and repoliticisation can thus be said to manifest and sustain themselves in close dynamism with each other. Foucault's historical analysis of the pastorate shed light on how pastoral revolts of conduct provoked an internal crisis in Christianity. His analysis demonstrated that the dominant order (the operationally conservative conducting power) and resistance (counter-conduct) to it cannot be treated in a simple binary opposition. Both exhibit conducting power, one through institutionalisation and consolidation, the other through offering an alternative way of being (self-

[7] By a negative and less constructive aspect of (re)politicisation, I do not mean to say that it cannot be constitutive of something. On the constitutive aspects of power, see Mouffe 2000, 2005.

[8] Both the performative and constitutive aspects of power have been discussed and theorised in length using different terminology by Jacques Rancière (1999, 2010; the interplay between politics and the police, post-democracy), Slavoj Žižek (1999; on the notion of the political) and Chantal Mouffe (2000, 2005, 2013; on the notion of post-politics and the political).

)governed. Derrida's concept of the violence of law, alternatively, helped me reiterate the point of shared structuredness between depoliticisation and repoliticisation by emphasising the interplay between constitutive and constituent aspects of political violence.

Concluding remarks

I started the analysis in this chapter by diagnosing liberalism as involving a significant tendency towards depoliticisation of political and social life. Here, I perhaps need to reiterate that my analysis for the most part focused on the later, more contemporary stages of liberal governmentality, what Foucault understood as neoliberal governmentality. While the governing principle of state governance with respect to the market economy under neoliberalism is self-limitation in the use of direct intervention, the state nonetheless takes a proactive role in enabling and accommodating the market through all means at its disposal: the rule of law and biopolitics internally, and diplomacy and the use of repressive force, externally. This contradictory neoliberal positon of the state challenges the debates around the (ir)relevancy of the state in today's globalised and interconnected world.

I then proceeded to analysing the phenomenon of repoliticisation by using Polanyi's notion of the double movement. My key argument in this section extends the analysis in the first part and frames the dynamics between depoliticisation and repoliticisation as an expression of the tension between liberalism and democracy in the current political order. The post-2008 waves of protest movements and the emergence of new radical left political parties in Europe are said to represent an important attempt at repoliticising the institutions of representative democracy. The latter have become increasingly alienated from the socio-economic concerns of the ordinary people in the recent decades by implementing the destructive market-friendly economic policies. Rather than treating depoliticisation as a politically neutral technique, which is deployed by governing elites for political convenience and blame-shifting, my analysis places the dynamics between depoliticisation and repoliticisation within a wider macro-political framework, which illuminates both the structural and ideological aspects of its dynamism.

In the second part of my analysis, I proposed to assess the processes of repoliticisation and depoliticisation at the micro-political level with more theoretical sophistication, which is lacking in depoliticisation studies. I argued that this task cannot be done without addressing the question of power. Through the discussion of Foucault's conceptual distinction between conduct and counter-conduct and Derrida's exposition of the violence of law, I wanted to illustrate the

interplay between the constitutive and transgressive aspects of repoliticisation and the constitutive and consolidating tendency found in depoliticisation. From this theoretical exercise, we can deduce three different observations of the repoliticisation/depoliticisation dynamic: (1) both processes share a governmental/conducting component, a desire to conduct, implicitly or explicitly; (2) they represent two different modes of power, one of ephemeral and transgressive character, the other being more structured and consolidating; (3) from a more macro-political perspective and through a longer historical timespan, a pattern emerges which could be described as a perpetual cycle between depoliticisation and repoliticisation. These three observations can offer useful theoretical tools for rethinking the relationship between extra-institutional resistance in radical politics and the institutions of representative democracy. Moreover, at the macro-political level of analysis, it can offer an alternative perspective on the crisis of representative democracy that we are seeing in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.

There is one critical point that I would like to raise in relation to the analytical approach used in this chapter. It needs to be noted that the manifestation of repoliticisation is not necessarily ephemeral, its impact (politically speaking) not always radical and its form not always non-institutionalised or taking place from outside the established political structures of representation (the examples of the new radical left parties in Spain and Slovenia can be pertinent here). The same can be said about depoliticisation: depoliticisation is not necessarily conservative in its political impact; it is not limited to the structures of the state, it can also manifest discursively in political movements (for instance, in the antipolitical discourse of the Indignados in Spain or the Occupy movement in New York). Even more paradoxically perhaps, depoliticisation is always necessarily based on a particular political decision or a set of guiding principles, which have political consequences; in this way, it is always in a way also politicising. Alternatively, politicisation entails making political, making part of a political struggle, something that was previously depoliticised, either through technical/expert language, religion or other meta-narrative that transcends the political, something that has been previously understood as self-evident and naturally given. This analytical difficulty to consistently grasp the two processes can be attributed to the ever on-going negotiation of the field of the political. Some events or decisions, which may at first appear depoliticised, can in retrospect and through contestation undergo a re-examination of their political character/content. Therefore, due diligence is needed when applying the (re)politicisation and depoliticisation terminology to ongoing political struggles.

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