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Cleavage Politics, Economic Crisis and Working-Class Voting. The Case of France

The French party system is currently under stress. The sudden decline of the National Front and the rise of an independent centre in the 2007 presidential and legislative elections have provoked the collapse of the electoral order established in 1984 and opened a realigning era. Since this moment of rupture, uncertainty and instability have been confirmed election after election.

Realignments are moments of important changes in the issues shaping party competition. In such a context, the 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent economic recession, which have revealed the failure of the neoliberal paradigm, could have provided a great opportunity for political leaders to redefine economic issues and to put them at the top of the agenda. For left-wing parties, it was the unique occasion to build a new majority including the working-class, whose gradual defection since the end of the 1970s is highly problematic to win the presidential election. However, the 2009 European elections and the 2010 regional elections have mainly featured the rise of cultural issues and a revival of the extreme Right, which turned into an unexpected surge in the 2011 cantonal elections.

By analyzing electoral returns in working-class constituencies since the 2007 presidential and legislative elections, the paper will show that: (1) left-wing parties could not take advantage of the deterioration of the economic situation to make substantial gains in the working-class electorate; (2) the extreme Right, on the contrary, could achieve a new breakthrough in the working-class; (3) this breakthrough corresponds to an increasing polarization along the cultural divide shaping the French party competition since the 1980s.

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Older single women and the risk of homelessness – The recession, inequalities and politics in rural Australia.

In 2006, the homeless population in Australia was 105,000, with most people staying temporarily with relatives or friends (45%), in boarding houses (21%) or improvised accommodation and sleeping rough (15%). 56% were men and 44% women. Approximately one sixth of the total homeless population were aged 55 years or older - an increase of 4,000

since 2001. These alarming statistics stimulated a flurry of federal and state Government, and charitable initiatives (Australian Government, 2008).

Although the public face of homelessness in adults is typically associated with men, the number of single older women at risk for homelessness is increasing - “In Australia in 2009...one of the most disadvantaged demographic profiles for a person...is to be old, single, poor, female and in private rental accommodation.” (Kimberley and Simons, 2009, p.47)

While not negating the empirical seriousness of this situation, many sociologists conceive homelessness as a social construct, with causal attribution falling into the familiar individual or structural interpretations of social problems. Either personal deficiencies including substance abuse and social disaffiliation, systemic factors such as lack of affordable housing and under/unemployment, or their convergence, are assumed to drive homelessness in a temporal linear relationship. A recent socio-political critique (Cronley, 2010, p. 320-330) suggests that the epidemiology of homeless in the United States of America has shifted over time, from a structural to an individual emphasis.

However, an Australian study of older single women (McFerran, 2010) contradicts this perception. Although most women successfully manage their life circumstances until their fifth or sixth decades, sudden adverse circumstances such as living alone, health and/or employment related crises, or age discrimination may result in unemployment. Census data (2006) shows that many Australians aged 55-64 years had stopped looking for work, and coupled with the failure or refusal of family support, leads to housing risk (McFerran, 2010, p.4). In addition, “Rural older women may suffer triple jeopardy: they are old, rural, female (and) disadvantaged when compared with both urban women and rural men in terms of both income and incidence of poverty.” (Dorfman, Mendez and Osterhaus, 2009, p.305) Unfortunately, very little is known about single older women’s experiences of becoming and being homeless in rural areas. This situation is only fleetingly addressed in McFerran’s report (pp. 46-48), and focuses on housing options, rather than the lived experiences of these women. Additional exploration of the failure of the family safety net is also neglected.

Accordingly this study will investigate the demographic, political, socio-economic, community and individual factors contributing to homelessness in older single rural women in Australia. The multi-method, multi-level matched case study methodological analysis will be modeled on the dynamic qualitative longitudinal approach successfully implemented by the United Kingdom Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (2009). Census and policy documents will contribute to comparative demographic, political and socio-economic profiles; key informant interviews and focus group discussions will provide community, social and rural contextualisations; and personal biographies of single older women will add individual level information.

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‘Craft’ing Resistance: Culture, Contesting Inequalities and ‘Hidden transcripts’

‘We cannot by any device of mental gymnastics relegate our [craftsmen] communities to the past. Their artistic expressions cannot be treated as curio objects, things of interest, only because of their ‘primitive’ character. They are living expressions of living peoples and if at all we are to enrapport with them, we cannot but treat them as contemporary expressions.’ [Swaminathan 1987; 13]

An understanding of the cultural style of the craftsmen (artisans) in India and their resistance to domination and multiple inequalities is enhanced when interpreted in relation to theories of muzzled, enveloped protest and discourse strategies based on dissimulation. In this article, I consider James Scott’s (1990) notion of discerning everyday resistance through what he calls ‘hidden transcripts,’ by foregrounding questions of authority, hierarchy, censorship vis-à-vis the relations of caste, class and modernity of artisans of India. Scott’s general framework has to be tempered in light of discussions of resistance through concealment, modulating selves, self-censorship and artisan’s prerogatives and opportunities for ‘projects.’

Analyzing the rituals, language and behaviors associated with resistance that is rarely through unions and collectives but rather through individual choices, private rather than demonstrated publicly, indicates that although the broad outline of Scott’s thesis is corroborated, specific elements invite reassessment. As J.M Levi has pointed out, that when hidden transcripts go public, the most compelling part of Scott’s framework is also the weakest.

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Examining Caste and Religion in Post-Industrial Mumbai. A Case Study of Mumbai’s Ex-millworkers’ Occupational Choices

This paper will examine the role of social institutions such as caste and religion in the context of neo-liberal socio-economic transformation in Mumbai. It examines whether caste and religion, are affecting (or not) Mumbai’s ex-millworkers occupational choices. Castes (read jatis- meaning sub-caste) have been historically associated with occupations. The occupations were ascribed by birth and made hereditary implying that individuals from particular castes ‘pursued a common occupation or a few common occupations’ (Srinivas: 1962: 4). In addition, there were severe restrictions on castes taking up other caste occupations. Whether such a division of occupations based on castes remained significant in modern India has nudged scholars across disciplines. It is this link between caste and occupation that has been a subject of great debate, especially, in the urban industrial context. Back then, scholars argued that modernity will reduce the influence of social institutions. Industrialisation and urbanization and the associated ideas of modernity; the rationalities of big business, state and planned development, were expected to reduce the influence of social institutions.

In the context of the India’s changing political economy, since the early 1990s (when India adopted the path of liberalization), once again it has been argued that the association between castes and occupations is eroding (Panini 1996: 60). The influence of ascriptive characteristics, such as caste and religion on individual access to scarce resources like jobs is declining due to the growing importance of a ‘secular’ class. In contrast to this view scholars have argued that social institutions continue to play a significant role in the economy,

especially, in deciding the life chances of individuals (Harriss-White: 2003; Thorat and Newman 2010). In fact Thorat and Newman's study demonstrate the 'evidence of continued discriminatory barriers in the formal urban labour market even for highly qualified Dalits (ex-untouchables) and Muslims' (Thorat and Newman 2010: 23). While the above mentioned views refer to the formal labour market we do not know much about the informal economy where more than 90 per cent of the Indian workforce is located. Yet, these two divergent views provide us with an entry point in investigating the phenomenon of social institutions and occupation in the context of Mumbai's changing political economy.

It is against this backdrop this paper examines Mumbai's ex-millworkers' livelihood responses to the closure of textile mills and seeks to investigate the following questions. What trends are emerging in terms of the survival and coping strategies employed by ex-millworkers? How are Dalits (ex-untouchables) and Muslims, as marginalized communities, coping with the challenges posed by the changes in the political economy? Broadly speaking, what is happening to caste and religion as a social institution in the context of neo-liberal urban socio-economic transformation and how far are the existing inequalities and hierarchies buttressed?

To seek answers to these questions this paper will rely on both qualitative as well as quantitative data collected from August 2008 till August 2009 and December 2010 till January 2011. The qualitative data includes 80 in-depth interviews with ex-millworkers, interviews with trade unionists, HR manager and individuals related with the issue of ex-millworkers. On the survey side, we have collected data of 1037 ex-millworkers. The data is processed using STATA software.

The results inform us that in post-industrial Mumbai, while the link between social institutions and occupations is weakening in wage labour, it still remains quite significant in small businesses. The occupations historically associated with the ex-untouchables, such as leather work, that is also considered as defiling by the high caste Hindus is still carried out by the former. Even today high caste Hindus do not take up such occupations. Interestingly, as Dalits (ex-untouchables) move away from caste based low status work, as a result of education attainment, their occupations are now taken up by the Muslims. While the international events such as the terrorist attacks increases the vulnerability of Muslims in the labour market, the politics of Hindu extremism is further worsening their situation. Fluidity is also seen in a few caste occupations. In case of barbers women from various castes have entered this business. A few barbers have transformed their beauty salons to meet the demands of the newly emerged middle class.

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What do outsiders want? Explaining welfare preferences in dualized countries

This paper analyses the implications of labor market dualization on distributive conflicts by examining welfare state preferences of insiders and outsiders. The rising inequality in OECD countries over the last two decades (OECD 2008) is tightly linked to an increasing divide between people in stable, regular employment and people with non-standard work. So far, the dualization literature examined differences in insider/outsider preferences only regarding employment policies (Rueda 2006, 2007, Emmenegger 2009, Burgoon and Dekker 2010). In this article, we move one step further into analyzing and argue that dualization is likely to result in new distributive conflicts. Insiders and outsiders have different welfare state preferences because different models of welfare states correspond differently to their needs. The welfare state models redistribution and social investment typically target the needs of outsiders, while the social insurance and liberal models are more advantageous for insiders. Hence, we test whether we find insider-outsider divides with regard to preferences for these welfare state models.

In addition, we test interaction effects with education because high skills do not prevent from outsidership and low-skilled insiders and low-skilled outsiders have distinct risk profiles and needs from high-skilled insiders or high-skilled outsiders respectively. Just as insiders and outsiders are expected to need a different welfare state, high-skilled and low-skilled individuals are supposed to differ regarding the kind of state intervention they prefer. We expect that low-skilled individuals prefer a welfare state that corrects the outcomes of individual labor market performances ex post, while high-skilled favor a welfare state that enables them to make use of their resources. We therefore analyze the welfare state preferences of four social groups (high-skilled insiders, high-skilled outsiders, low-skilled insiders and low-skilled outsiders). The regression analysis is based on micro-level data from the ESS round 4 2008.

The results consistently confirm the expected insider-outsider divide with regard to all analyzed social policy preferences (redistribution, social investment, social insurance and the respondent's support for the liberal model). Furthermore, the analysis of interaction effects with education shows that insider-outsider divides on social investment and social insurance prevail only among the medium- and high-skilled respondents, whereas attitudes towards the redistribution of income differ between insiders and outsiders throughout the whole workforce.

The article provides evidence that the increasing dualization of labor markets is reflected in individual preferences and attitudes. This is an important result for studies that analyze the political mobilization of insiders and outsiders and – more generally – the implications of dualization for post-industrial welfare politics and partisan politics.