Comparing Strategies of (De)Politicisation in Europe

Governance, Resistance and Anti-politics

Edited by Jim Buller,
Pınar E. Dönmez,
Adam Standring
and Matthew Wood

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palgrave
macmillan

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ISBN 978-3-319-64235-2 ISBN 978-3-319-64236-9 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64236-9

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018939731

Cover illustration: Kemphoto collection/Alamy Stock Photo

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer International Publishing AG part of Springer Nature
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

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CHAPTER 1

Depoliticisation, Post-politics and the Problem of Change

Jim Buller, Pınar E. Dönmez, Adam Standring and Matthew Wood

Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, it has become fashionable to assert that the traditional model of representative democracy is increasingly under challenge. Evidence in support of this thesis points to an accelerating decline in voter turnout since the 1960s (Delwit 2013; Dalton 2014; Thijssen et al. 2016; Hooge and Kern 2017) a slump in membership

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J. Buller et al. (eds.), *Comparing Strategies of (De)Politicisation in Europe*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64236-9_1

of political parties (Van Biezen et al. 2012; Scarrow 2015) and a significant fall in the public's trust of national politicians (Nye et al. 1997; Hetherington and Rudolph 2008; Algan et al. 2017). A range of explanations have been produced to account for this rise in "anti-politics". Some scholars point to a decline in "social capital" within the electorate: a disintegration of the social bonds and sense of civic engagement that once held communities together (Putnam 2000; Stolle and Hooghe 2005; Bauman 2007; Keele 2007). This disenchantment can also be viewed as the product of a less deferential and more critical orientation that citizens have adopted towards their leaders, especially since the 1970s (Norris 1999, 2002, 2011). Other scholars have asserted that the lowering of the voting age to 18 in most advanced liberal democracies is the key reason for this trend. This decision has enfranchised a group of young voters who are arguably the most "atomised" and least integrated into social networks (Franklin 2004). As a result, they are less likely to participate in politics, either at the national or even at the local level. Colin Hay has described these arguments as "demand-side" explanations (Hay 2007: 11–39).

However, according to Hay, this crisis of representative democracy can also be traced to certain "supply-side" factors. Anti-politics does not only (or primarily) reflect a lack of attachment (demand) on the part of the public towards their representative institutions. To understand this malaise, we must also consider the kind of service our political classes are providing in the twenty-first century. In particular, Hay draws attention to what he sees as the dominant tendency towards the depoliticisation of governance in the modern era. Depoliticisation refers to a process whereby public officials prefer to disavow or devolve responsibility for more and more areas of public policy away from the state. This tendency is partly driven by domestic sources, most notably the influence of public choice theory, which has developed a powerful critique of the impact politicians and civil servants can have on policy (Hay 2007: 90–122; see also Hood 2002, 2011). It has also been driven by external forces, especially economic globalisation and the way powerful transnational companies and financial speculators have "hollowed-out" the nation state. Put a different way, the public has become disengaged from politics precisely because their elected representatives give the impression that they possess neither the capacities nor the inclination to govern (Hay 2007: 123–152).

There is agreement within the literature that, while increasingly dominant, this depoliticisation process is still contingent and potentially reversible. Indeed, in recent years, we have witnessed a range of

events that appear to confirm this assertion. Since the financial crisis of 2008, protests and demonstrations have sprung up in a range of countries against the austerity policies that have been implemented to reduce government deficits and reign in public debt. More recently, both the decision by the British public to leave the European Union (EU) and the election of Donald Trump as President of the USA have been widely interpreted as a revolt of the "left behind" generation against "the Establishment" in these countries (see, for example, Ford and Goodwin 2017; Inglehart and Norris 2016). Moreover, as we shall see throughout this book, disruption and resistance to depoliticised, neoliberal rule can be observed in a range of everyday, localised settings, as individuals and groups engage in ongoing battles with governments to promote and preserve their interests and identity. The question driving this edited collection is how to comprehend the contingent and dynamic ontology of depoliticisation: how to make sense of instances where the seemingly "natural" and omnipresent condition of depoliticised governance is contested and challenged.

This chapter reviews the existing literature on depoliticisation and assesses its utility for exploring the potentially contentious and unpredictable nature of this process. As such, it makes two claims. First, although multiple definitions of depoliticisation are present in current scholarship on the subject, to simplify matters they can be classified under two main headings: (a) as a systemic condition that inscribes the whole of society; and (b) as a more specific governing strategy or technique which originates at the state level but can have a significant influence on society. Second, while both approaches have plenty to contribute to our understanding of depoliticisation, they are not without their problems when it comes to appreciating the contingent and variable nature of this phenomenon.

Depoliticisation as a Systemic Condition

Scholarly interest in the subject of depoliticisation has become a real growth area in the social sciences over the last two decades. Naturally, there has been plenty of work produced that has sought to clarify, develop and refine the boundaries and scope of the concept itself. However, academics from a range of disciplines have also utilised the depoliticisation approach to investigate an increasing number of empirical cases. Political scientists have employed depoliticisation to understand the decision-making process in a range of policy areas, including

economic policy (Burnham 2000, 2001, 2014, 2017; De Geode 2004; Buller and Flinders 2005; Swanson 2007; Kettell 2008; Rodgers 2009; Strange 2014); health policy (Wood 2015; Buller 2018); energy policy (Kuzemko 2014); environmental policy (Bluhdorn 2015; Wood 2016); immigration policy (Kunz 2011; Darling 2014); and international development (Harriss 2002; Kamat 2015). Researchers in sociology and urban studies have found the concept helpful to understand the politics of "the city" (Swyngedouw 2015; Beveridge and Koch 2017). Depoliticisation has been applied by students with an interest in language and linguistics to understand how political discourse and debate are shaped and delimited (Bates et al. 2014). Finally, political theorists have examined the historical origins of particular depoliticisation strategies with the purpose of revealing their temporary and conditional status and critiquing them (Jenkins 2011).

Although depoliticisation is a concept that has now established a firm footing in a number of academic subjects, not surprisingly perhaps it has been defined in different ways by its proponents. At the risk of oversimplification, in this introduction we propose to distinguish between two main usages of the term. For some scholars, depoliticisation denotes a generalised condition not just of the polity, but of societies more generally (e.g. Boggs 2000). This state of affairs is characterised by a consensual mode of governance where argument and dissent are marginalised and political space is colonised in the defence of neoliberal values and norms. In this sense, depoliticisation signifies a retreat of "the political", where "the political" is synonymous with the qualities of contestation, deliberation and participation. Broader contradictions that may exist within political systems are reduced to discrete policy problems that need to be managed; citizens as a potentially disruptive collective have become a disparate set of individual consumers in a world where everything is increasingly commodified; elections are nothing more than a mechanism for choosing between similar administrators of the same neoliberal logic (Wilson and Swyngedouw 2015a). Some academics prefer the concept "post-politics" (Wilson and Swyngedouw 2015b) or "post-democracy" (Ranciere 1999; Crouch 2004) to depoliticisation when it comes to describing this situation. Others use these terms interchangeably. In this section, we will employ the concept of post-politics to describe the literature which depicts depoliticisation as a systemic state of affairs.

As it has developed, this post-politics interpretation has become associated with a number of more specific claims (see also Beveridge and

Koch in this volume). As suggested above, for some, this general condition reflects the triumph of neoliberalism as an ideology. Proponents of this view acknowledge that neoliberalism itself is a contested term (e.g. Boas and Gans-Morse 2009). It has been applied in a number of different ways to a variety of spatial and temporal contexts (Harvey 2005; Peck 2010: 1–34). That said, many definitions of neoliberalism do contain similar properties: a confidence that the market is an efficient mechanism for the allocation of resources; an acceptance that the state will have to intervene in the economy to facilitate and reproduce market relations; a belief that a global regime of free trade and capital mobility is desirable; and a commitment to reduce the level of welfare benefits to encourage individual participation in the economy (Hay 2007: 97). For supporters of the post-politics thesis, a post-political world is one where such ideas and policies have become hegemonic. There is little or no room to debate or propose alternatives. Indeed, some scholarship comes close to using the two terms synonymously: post-politics (depoliticisation) is another label for describing the triumph of neoliberalism.

For others, post-politics does not just demonstrate the dominance of neoliberal ideas and policies, but should be conceptualised in Foucauldian terms as embodying the ascendancy of a powerful mode of neoliberal governmentality. In this sense, neoliberalism is understood as a form of normative reason that penetrates all aspects of society and politics. Decision-making in this post-political world now emphasises the importance of "output" rather than "input" legitimacy. Governments (especially elected politicians) should be judged on their ability to solve problems and particularly their record of economic growth, employment and well-managed public services. How such outcomes are achieved are of secondary consideration ("what counts is what works"). In practice, non-partisan "experts" (often from the private sector) are increasingly drafted into implement a range of public functions because they are believed to provide more effective service. Indeed, all of us as human beings are gradually being remade as market actors. More and more we are preoccupied with enhancing our "portfolio value" in all domains of life: a concern which is realised through self-investment or the process of attracting other "investors" (Crouch 2011; Brown 2015; Kamat 2015; Raco 2015).

The spread of neoliberal governmentality throughout society has implications for the practice of democracy. Indeed, democracy may actually pose a threat to neoliberal governmentality in this post-political

world. If experts are to deliver services effectively, they need to be able to get on with the job free from political influence. At the same time, the democratic aspirations and possibilities for public policy are confined to what these experts and managers say is possible. Lines of accountability become confused and unclear, especially if things go wrong. The electorate seek to hold politicians responsible for mistakes made in office, only to be told that the fault lies elsewhere with impersonal (invisible) structural forces beyond anyone's control. Instead, national leaders style themselves as public relations gurus, whose primary role is to craft a killer sound bite and to come across well in the media. What counts for serious political discourse atrophies into a series of platitudes that nobody (especially the politicians themselves) takes seriously (Flinders 2012).

The literature makes clear that there is nothing permanent about this depoliticised or post-political condition. Supporters of this argument often adopt an explicitly anti-foundational ontological position (Marchant 2007) and are united in claiming that post-politics is contingent state of affairs which is open to change. In other words, there is no essential ground or permanent foundation underpinning neoliberalism or indeed any other social order. All political regimes are temporary, but are structured to conceal the fact that they have no constant and immutable basepoint. In so doing, these regimes will try to present themselves as natural and inevitable entities, while in reality they are anything but. Because any social order is contingent, it is in theory open to disruption by those who oppose it. In this moment of disruption, a "political difference" opens up between (a) society as it is contingently instituted and (b) its absent ground—revealing a disparity between the two. Quite how this political difference opens up and change occurs is a matter of dispute between different theorists of post-politics.

For Chantal Mouffe (2005), *the political* is conceptualised as the dimension of antagonism which is said to constitute all human societies (its absent ground). *Politics* on the other hand is the contingent set of tactics and practices that tries to disguise this absent ground (antagonism), most notably through the construction of ideological hegemony. The *post-political condition* (or depoliticisation) represents the moment where such hegemony (in this case, of neoliberal ideals) is created and the possibility of antagonism is repressed. Mouffe argues that the suppression of ideological differences will eventually generate a backlash of violent nationalism or religious fundamentalism, leading to the

possibility of change. Moreover, she makes clear that such a development is not desirable and to be avoided if possible. To prevent such a turn of events, she advocates a renewed programme of social democracy within existing representative political institutions to provide a peaceful outlet through which difference and antagonism may be channelled.

For Jacques Ranciere (1999), *the political* (society's absent ground) is not characterised by antagonism, but by the equality of each person within society. *Politics* or "the police" to use Ranciere's preferred term is a conditional form of rule that tries to conceal the inequalities that exist in practice: in this sense, it is structured against "those who have no part in society". The police govern in this way employing three "figures" of depoliticisation: archi-politics; para-politics; and meta-politics. Archi-politics masks these disparities by representing society as an organic whole with nothing left over. Para-politics achieves the same effect by institutionalising competition for places within an established hierarchy (i.e. a representative assembly or parliament) thereby helping to ameliorate any divisions. Finally, meta-politics is a technique which attempts to obscure inequality by subordinating all politics to a deeper essence (i.e. the market economy). *Post-politics* or *post-democracy* as Ranciere prefers signifies a condition where such techniques have been successful: where inequality has been disavowed (not repressed) so that its objectionable qualities are no longer a matter of contention. Change is also possible for Ranciere, although "those who have no part in society" will reveal the contingency of the hierarchical rule they are subjected to, not through a dramatic revolutionary moment, but through a multitude of local interventions and interruptions.

Slavoj Žižek (1999) differs again in defining *the political* (society's absent ground) as a form of class struggle, which *politics/the police* aims to disguise. To help explain how this temporary form of police rule is constructed, Žižek employs Ranciere's three figures of depoliticisation, although he accuses Ranciere of fetishising the police because he neglects the role that violence plays in maintaining that order. At the same time, Žižek suggests a fourth technique which he terms ultra-politics. Ultra-politics refers to the establishment of a distinction between "us" and "them", a difference that has the effect of denying any shared space within which opposite sides might come together to engage peacefully. For Žižek, *post-politics* is not conceived as the repression of antagonism (Mouffe) not the disavowal of inequality (Ranciere) but as the foreclosure of class struggle, although again, this condition is contingent and

subject to change. Like Mouffe, Žižek sees this foreclosure of class struggle finally resulting in an explosion of nationalist violence but (unlike Mouffe) he welcomes this moment as a potential trigger for a communist revolution leading to the overthrow of capitalist class rule.

This scholarship on post-politics has made an important contribution to our understanding of contemporary governance in the twenty-first century and has generated a lively research agenda, especially for academics on the left. That said, the approach is not without its criticisms, some of which are relevant to the concerns and focus of this book. First, this post-politics argument has been disputed empirically. Indeed, Jonathan Dean (2014) has gone further in arguing that this post-political thesis can often rest on claims which are supported by little or no academic evidence.[1] Defenders of this interpretation simply assert that depoliticisation exists and then presume agreement on the part of the reader. Dean suggests this post-political perspective (or "narrative of apoliticality" as he calls it) is the equivalent of an academic story of "folk tale", recycled on the conference circuit and in scholarly literature with little scrutiny or scepticism. Put a different way, this scholarship on depoliticisation is best viewed as a collective frame of reference rather than the work of an individual author or authors. This collective frame of reference exists and endures as much for the psychological and emotional support it provides to those academics who reproduce it.

Second, despite arguing that its anti-foundational ontological position means that post-politics will always be a contingent and temporary condition, some doubt that this theoretical stance on its own will help researchers to identify and investigate the dynamics of depoliticisation/politicisation processes. Irrespective of its ontological status, this broad and holistic account of depoliticisation (or post-politics) as a systemic condition is not nuanced enough to specify the precise circumstances whereby consensual neoliberal rule is likely to be disputed and challenged. As noted above, this post-political interpretation exists on both a material and discursive level. It can take the form of a dominant neoliberal ideological hegemony, a powerful governing rationality (or both). Moreover, in a number of accounts, the pervasiveness of post-politics appears to be so total and all-encompassing that it is difficult to envisage any situation in which resistance might get off the ground, let alone experience success. Interestingly, editors of a recent collection on the subject of post-politics accept that a number of chapters within the book, "… convey a claustrophobic sense of closure …" concerning

the possibility of challenges to neo-liberalism (Swyngedouw and Wilson 2015: 300; see also Larner 2015; Van Puymbroeck and Oosterlynck 2015; Beveridge and Koch, in this volume).

In particular, there is a danger that this interpretation of post-politics may actually reproduce the dominant form of neoliberal rule it is trying to critique. By giving analytical priority to the system in its entirety, there is little obvious space in this literature for political agency to disrupt post-politics, unless it is in the form of some dramatic intervention. This is the position of Žižek, as well as his supporters (Swyngedouw and Wilson 2015). Because depoliticisation is understood as a systemic condition that permeates society, any counter-movement that falls short of revolution against the system as a whole is likely to be ineffective and end up reinforcing the structural properties of the status quo (Dean 2009; Darling 2014). However, such a normative project places a burden of expectation on political agency that human beings are unlikely to be able to live up to in practice. The result then is an ingrained pessimism about the possibilities for change, as the date for the overthrow of neoliberal capitalist rule is continually and perpetually put back. Yet, ironically it is the conceptual and analytical framework of the post-politics thesis that is partly responsible for this downbeat mood.

In short, scholarly research that presents depoliticisation as a systemic condition can often emphasise the importance of structure and produce explanations that stress the continuity of neoliberal rule, rather than change. It is not being claimed here that we as academics can understand change without a conception of structure, or an appreciation of the broader system under investigation. An empirical account of change may very well begin with a discussion of how contradictions *within* the system create the opportunities for reform of the status quo. Of course actors will then attempt to exploit such possibilities, but it is important to remember that those self-same actors will still remain inhibited by the institutional context that surrounds them. However, it is difficult not to conceive change without some notion of agency (Sztompka 1993; Hay 1999). More to the point, to insist (as Žižek does) that the only worthwhile idea of political agency is one whereby human beings participate in a radical transformative moment seems unduly restrictive and unhelpful. This chapter goes on to critically assess a body of work which both contains a narrower conception of depoliticisation and highlights the role political agency plays in the implementation of this practice. Can such an approach better help us to account for the dynamic nature of this phenomenon?

Depoliticisation as a Governing Strategy

Instead of viewing it as a societal or systemic condition, some academics have conceptualised depoliticisation as a specific governing strategy for disguising the political nature of the policy process. One of the most influential definitions in this tradition is provided by Peter Burnham in his writings on British political economy. For Burnham, depoliticisation is the process by which public officials or state managers in office "… plac[e] at one remove the *political character* of decision-making" (italics in original) (Burnham 2001: 127). As Burnham has stressed, depoliticisation does not equate to the devolution or decentralisation of power. Politicians aim to benefit from the appearance of no longer being responsible for outcomes, while at the same time trying to maintain influence covertly behind the scenes. In other words, depoliticisation does not represent a retreat of the political so much as an extension of the political, where politics is understood as the pursuit of power particularly by actors at the state or governmental level (see also Wood and Flinders 2014; Hay 2014). This appreciation of politics has proved to be controversial, a point we shall be returning to below.

Proponents of the argument that depoliticisation is a specific governing strategy have documented a range of more specific techniques or instruments designed to help place the political character of decision-making at one remove (Burnham 2001). The first (and perhaps most dominant) technique is the reassignment of tasks from the party or parties in office on to non-majoritarian bodies at arms-length from government. An example of such a ploy is the decision of many governments around the world to grant independence to their central banks to implement monetary policy. Politicians remain in overall control because they set the broad objectives (e.g. an inflation target) yet benefit from the fact that controversial day-to-day decisions about interest rates and money market operations are taken elsewhere. A second depoliticisation technique, often discussed in the political economy literature, is the employment by politicians of explicit public rules which give the impression that their discretion to manipulate decisions for electoral ends has been limited. Examples in this context are the fiscal rules adopted by many governments to ensure tax and public spending patterns remain sustainable over the medium term. Finally, state managers may attempt to depoliticise decision-making by increasing the accountability, transparency and external validation of the policy process. The UK government's creation

of Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) to ensure that government statistics remained free from political interference could be interpreted as an instance of this technique.

Flinders and Buller (2006) further deconstruct this concept of depoliticisation as a governing strategy. Drawing on the work of Peter Hall (1993), they distinguish between three elements: the principles or objectives driving depoliticisation; the tactics that political elites employ to help them realise these principles; and the tools that support these various techniques. The majority of Flinders and Buller's paper is devoted to discussing three key tactics, and it is here that overlap with Burnham's techniques exists. For example, Flinders and Buller's notion of "institutional depoliticisation" is very similar to Burnham's description of politicians reassigning the implementation of policy from government onto neutral and expert arms-length bodies. Likewise, Flinders and Buller's depiction of "rule-based depoliticisation" extends Burnham's ideas to show that the popularity of this tactic was not confined to the period since the 1990s, but has a long and distinguished historical pedigree. Arguably, the most significant innovation in Flinders and Buller's article is their exposition of "preference-shaping depoliticisation". This tactic refers to the way state managers deploy ideological or rhetorical claims to justify the placing of a particular issue or function beyond the realm of politics. As we shall see, a number of contributors to this volume have highlighted the importance of this "discursive depoliticisation" in their research.

The popularity of depoliticisation as a governing strategy is said to reflect a range of motives. Advocates of depoliticisation (usually those individuals who deploy such methods) argue that placing the decision-making process at one remove from party politics helps to enhance the credibility of government and those who work within it. At a time where (as we have seen) public trust in the capabilities of politicians is said to be declining, devolving responsibility for policy onto neutral, independent experts can be a way of enhancing the authority of political institutions. Critics of depoliticisation assert this practice reflects a lack of self-confidence on the part of governing elites. In a world where they are perennially under the media spotlight, increasingly sensitive and self-conscious, public officials use depoliticisation techniques to shift responsibility onto others and to insulate themselves from blame in the likely event (as they see it) that government action fails to achieve the desired results (Gash et al. 2010). What is notable here is the emphasis on

agency. In this literature, specific depoliticisation strategies are explicitly linked to human beings who are believed to utilise them for some objective or purpose. It is accepted that these actors will be constrained by the structural context that surrounds them, but the precise contours of these structural or systemic constraints are given less treatment.

If depoliticisation is conceptualised as a governing technique for disguising the inherently political character of decision-making, Burnham has used the term politicisation to describe instances of governing elites adopting more responsibility, with the effect that the partisan complexion of public policy becomes more transparent. In this context, he discusses the post-war practice of governments taking a number of industries into public ownership, an enthusiasm within Whitehall (especially in the 1960s and 1970s) for formulating national planning instruments, and the various attempts of public officials to negotiate prices and incomes policies with business organisations and trade unions (Burnham 2001: 130–133). More recently, Burnham has documented the growing Treasury politicisation of UK monetary policy from the 1970s. In particular, this trend refers to the period whereby the Chancellor of the Exchequer took charge of implementing changes to what was then known as the Minimum Lending Rate: a process which continued into the 1990s until, of course, it was ended by the Blair government's decision to grant operational independence to the Bank of England (Burnham 2007).

This interpretation of depoliticisation as a governing strategy has also elicited critical comment. If an understanding of depoliticisation/post-politics as a systemic condition is problematic because it is too broad, Burnham's description has provoked objection for being too narrow (Jenkins 2011). As we have seen, the focus is on political elites and how they use various techniques to maintain or increase their power over the political process. However, some academics have complained that such a definition of depoliticisation appears to confine the study of this subject to the governmental or state level. Groups or individuals outside of the state are not the primary analytical focus, even though governmental depoliticisation strategies may very well be directed at these actors. Burnham has defended this concept, using similar arguments to those who are critical of broader conceptions of depoliticisation. The advantage of this relatively narrow term is it scores highly in terms of precision and clarity of meaning. Conversely, the drawback with more expansive usages which argue that depoliticisation can exist either at the state or at the societal level is they lack a "cutting edge". They lead

to the "… rather bland assertion that depoliticisation is everywhere" (Burnham 2014: 189; see also Foster et al. 2014: 226–230).

That being said, to define politicisation primarily as a governmental phenomenon does not "feel" quite right. If depoliticisation is an elite strategy whereby public officials attempt to stay in control by disguising their influence over the policy process, should not the properties of politicisation convey the polar opposite? At the very least, the term should not simply refer to instances where politicians are seen to assume more responsibility for decisions, but should also capture the possibility that this change of stance takes place as a result of pressure on politicians from others to play a more visible role. After all, if depoliticisation is the preferred mode of governance for the twenty-first century, it seems reasonable to assume that elected officials will only take on more responsibility for problems if they are in some way urged or compelled to do so. Like depoliticisation then, our understanding of politicisation requires a focus not simply on elites, but on other societal groups who are affected by their machinations. If we want to appreciate depoliticisation/politicisation as conditional tendencies that are potentially subject to change, the boundaries of both concepts and our understanding of politics more generally need to be expanded.

Put differently, this definition of depoliticisation/politicisation as a governing strategy might be too narrow to fully expound the ontological properties of this phenomenon. Governmental strategies (whether they are instances of depoliticisation or politicisation) are almost always deployed with the intention of influencing actors outside of the state. These individuals or groups may acquiesce in, or even collaborate with, these depoliticisation techniques: in which case, we might surmise that this statecraft has been successful in achieving its objectives. But (as already highlighted) we cannot assume this outcome will take place. There may be occasions where depoliticisation is questioned, challenged or even resisted. Burnham does acknowledge depoliticisation tactics may generate unintended consequences, which, in turn, can result in their politicisation and ultimate failure. He is certainly aware that the history of British macroeconomic policy is littered with the collapse of such depoliticisation experiments.[2] Yet, how these depoliticisation techniques are compromised, leading them to break down is not a prominent theme of Burnham's work on the subject. If we want to understand the dynamics of depoliticisation/politicisation processes, such a theme will have to become an important consideration for this edited collection.

One writer on depoliticisation who operates with a wider comprehension of politics is Colin Hay (2007: 61–70). In particular, Hay provides a definition of politics which disassociates the term from a particular location (such as the government or state level). Instead, Hay's conception of politics contains four different but interrelated properties. First, politics is about *choice* and should be contrasted with necessity or fatalism. Politics, according to Hay, cannot arise in situations where human purpose can exercise no influence. Second, politics involves the capacity for *agency*. It is almost always human beings as actors that make choices in politics (both on their own and in collectivities). Third, if politics is about human actors exercising choices, it must also be about *deliberation*. Actors must have the space to discuss both publicly and privately various alternative courses of action (or inaction) that are open to them. Finally, politics entails *social interaction*: in this sense, an action is political if it is likely to have consequences for others. There are concerns that this definition of politics is too broad and all-encompassing. But leaving these concerns aside for the moment, we have a depiction of "the political" more able to accommodate the fact it is a contingent, fluid and indeterminate process (see also Jenkins 2011: 159).

It follows from this discussion that depoliticisation/politicisation processes can take place either at the government or at the societal level. Indeed, Hay goes further and provides a slightly more differentiated account of the spaces in which politics may take place, which builds on this twofold dichotomy (Ibid.: 70–88). Politics can exist at the governmental, the public or the private level. There is a further arena within which politics does not reside. Hay refers to this as the "realm of necessity", a domain where the scope for choice, agency deliberation and social interactions does not exist and where "Fate and nature fight it out for supremacy" (Ibid.: 79). According to this typology, politicisation and depoliticisation processes shift from one context to another in the following way.

Politicisation (1): takes place when an issue is promoted from the realm of necessity to the private sphere. Examples in this context might include the questioning of religious authority or recognition of the impact of human agency in areas previously believed to be the preserve of natural processes (i.e. environmental degradation).

Politicisation (2): occurs when an issue is promoted from the private sphere to the public sphere, such as the conscious raising activities of charities or social movements.

Politicisation (3): arises when an issue is promoted from the public to the governmental sphere (e.g. when the lobbying campaign of an interest group leads to the introduction of legislation).

Hay's discussion of depoliticisation follows the reverse logic.

Depoliticisation (1): takes place when an issue is relegated from the governmental to the public sphere, such as the displacement of public functions onto independent bodies or the market.

Depoliticisation (2): occurs when an issue is relegated from the public to the private sphere. An example in this context might be the representation of an issue (obesity) in such a way that responsibility is widely believed to reside with the individual, rather than business or the government.

Depoliticisation (3): arises when an issue is relegated from the private sphere to the realm of necessity. Faced with action they would rather not undertake, governments (and other actors) may sometimes argue that they have no choice but to make such unpalatable decisions because of forces not in their control (i.e. an appeal to the imperatives of "globalisation").

Matt Wood and Matt Flinders (2014) have built on Hay's typology by mapping three "faces" of depoliticisation on to it. In so doing, they provide a broader interdisciplinary framework which helps to illuminate the crucial point that depoliticisation processes operate in the wider public and private spheres of society. Their first face (governmental depoliticisation) is similar to Hay's depoliticisation (1). In charting how issues are relegated from the governmental to the public sphere, Wood and Flinders emphasise how the displacement of state functions onto arms-length bodies or quangos has arguably become the predominant technique in this domain. Second, their account of societal depoliticisation augments Hay's description of depoliticisation (2). In particular, when it comes to explaining how and why subjects are demoted from the public to the private sphere, Wood and Flinders highlight the power of the media in both trivialising politics and fostering civic disengagement. Finally, Wood and Flinders' discussion of discursive depoliticisation relates directly to

depoliticisation (3)—the consignment of a topic from the private sphere to the realm of necessity. Here, attention is drawn to the importance of language and the role of individual speech acts in helping to normalise or naturalise certain scenarios or outcomes. Wood and Flinders accept that in some ways, discursive depoliticisation is a category that cuts across all boundaries (public v. private; state v. society). In this sense, this face of depoliticisation may be something that is applicable to all levels of society and politics, a point with which Hay (2014: 299) concurs.

The Hay (Wood and Flinders) typology has clear advantages from our perspective. Not only it is grounded in a more expansive conception of politics, it is consistent with our focus on the open-ended and dynamic nature of depoliticisation/politicisation processes. One possible criticism of these frameworks (following on from our earlier analysis) is they neglect the role of structure. Even if we admit that agency is important for apprehending depoliticisation/politicisation tendencies within different arenas, these strategies and counter-strategies will not take place in a structural vacuum. Hay, Flinders and Wood are of course conscious of the importance of structure. As Hay in particular has constantly reminded us, if we want to make sense of social and political outcomes, we need explanations that assume agents and structures are necessarily interdependent entities, mutually implicated in a dialectical relationship (e.g. see Hay 2002: 89–134). Yet, such a position does not detract from the more general point: if structure is important, where does it fit into these frameworks? Do different structures constrain agency at different levels? Does one super-structure exist which constitutes the relationships that exist within and between the governmental, societal and private domains (not to mention the realm of necessity)?

A second issue for this volume to consider is whether the Hay and Wood/Flinders typologies simplify the reality of depoliticisation/politicisation processes too much. In focussing on how these processes shift from one level to another, they give the impression that these tendencies are discreet and distinct to particular domains until they shift to the next level and change into a different type (i.e. when they move from being "governmental" to "societal" depoliticisation). In practice, the reason why depoliticisation/politicisation occurs at any one level may be because *of the relationships* between actors and issues *across these levels*. For example, the electorate in Britain (which arguably exists at the societal/private level) accepts the authority of the Bank of England over monetary policy (governmental level) because

this governmental depoliticisation technique is widely supported by political parties, business groups and the trade union movement (who may reside both at the governmental and at the societal levels). In other words, depoliticisation/politicisation processes do not *just* spill over from one domain to the next. They exist simultaneously and may be linked together across arenas. Understanding how particular depoliticisation processes evolve at one level may involve tracing how the actors and institutions at this level are connected and influenced by actors and institutions at other levels (see also Wood and Flinders 2014: 161).

In this introductory chapter, we have surveyed the literature on depoliticisation and have categorised this work according to two main definitions: depoliticisation as a systemic condition and depoliticisation as a governing strategy. While this scholarship contains many valuable insights into the workings of contemporary governance, we have also highlighted certain criticisms that may be levelled at it. In particular, it has been suggested that the analytical focus of much of this work is not geared up to investigating the conditional and potentially dynamic nature of this statecraft. The systemic definition is thought by some to be too broad. Despite its assumption that depoliticisation is a contingent phenomenon, it gives the impression that this condition is so pervasive throughout society that any challenge to this state of affairs is nigh on impossible to imagine. Conversely, understood as a governing strategy, our definition of depoliticisation looks too narrow. Here, the preoccupation is with state elites and how they (re)produce this form of political rule. The role and importance of societal actors (who are most likely to pose a challenge to depoliticisation strategies) are neglected.

Instead, if we are to begin to get to grips with examining the dynamics of depoliticisation, this chapter has highlighted two issues that need to be kept in mind. First, any account of depoliticisation/politicisation processes should involve a framework or approach that takes both structure and agency seriously. Governing elites and societal groups are purposive actors who can make politics happen through choice, deliberation and interaction. Yet, the environment they inhabit will be comprised of structures that both constrain and reproduce them. Second, within this structural context, any understanding of the dynamics of depoliticisation may involve studying a relationship between actors located at different spatial settings. Wherever depoliticisation is practised, its success is likely to hinge on how it is received by those human beings and institutions at

which it is aimed. Of course, how this relationship unfolds over time will remain a contingent matter: the dynamics of depoliticisation/politicisation processes may be affected by tensions within these relationships, the impact of structure on these relationships or both.

Plan for the Rest of the Book

This edited collection is one of the first books to examine the subject of depoliticisation from a comparative perspective. Up until now, a lot of the literature on depoliticisation has applied this concept either to Britain or the USA, although it is increasingly being used to make sense of politics and governance in other regions of the world. This volume also contains a study of depoliticisation in the UK, but this case is analysed alongside a number of others from a range of various European countries. Moreover, these countries have consciously been chosen because they offer a slightly different perspective from the "usual suspects" (France, Germany, etc.) that are often included in comparative studies of Europe. They include: the politicisation of corruption in Bulgaria (Chapter 3); depoliticisation and partisanship in Cyprus (Chapter 5); the politicisation of the European question in Portugal (Chapter 6); the politicisation of political economy in Turkey (Chapter 7); and the politicisation of the homeless question in Hungary (Chapter 9). It is hoped this comparative perspective will generate novel and interesting insights into the dynamics of depoliticisation.

At the same time, we have tried to combine this comparative perspective with an approach that is genuinely interdisciplinary. In assembling the various cases for this book, we deliberately sought out scholars from different subject areas in the social sciences. In this context, our coverage includes insights from political theory/philosophy (Toplišek); political economy (Dönmez); and political sociology (Charalambous and Kanol). At the same time, the chapters from Griggs and Howarth and Standring utilise analytical concepts and methodological techniques which take their inspiration from the study of language and linguistics, whereas Beveridge and Koch critically assess the employment of depoliticisation and post-politics approaches in urban studies research. There are, of course, risks in adopting such an interdisciplinary strategy. Academics from different disciplines, armed with different assumptions and research agendas, may simply talk past each other, leading to a book that is less than the sum of its parts.

To avoid this problem, we have asked each contributor to address a list of common questions.

1. How is the phenomenon of depoliticisation best defined?
2. What evidence is there that depoliticisation (however defined) is being challenged or even undermined?
3. How might we begin to explain instances whereby depoliticisation (however defined) is contested and even reversed?

These questions arose from a series of workshops that were held in the lead up to the writing of this book. These workshops were made possible through funding from the European Consortium for Political Research and the Political Studies Association, and we thank both organisations for their financial assistance. At these workshops, the contributors were asked to present preliminary drafts of their chapters and to give each other feedback on their findings. Contributors were not required or expected to address all of the questions listed above; nor did we as editors want to constrain the answers that each author produced. Rather, the questions were designed to serve as a collective frame of reference, in the hope that each contributor would provide answers and arguments that "talked to each other" and shared some common ground. Whether this proved to be the case is a subject we return to in the concluding chapter.

Notes

1. Dean does not level this charge at all academics associated with this literature. For example, Boggs, Bluhdorn and Crouch are praised for providing, "… detailed and sustained accounts of existing logics of depoliticisation" (Dean 2014: 456).
2. Such examples would include the Gold Standard (1925–1931); the Medium Term Financial Strategy (1979–1985); the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (1990–1992); New Labour's fiscal rules (1997–2007).

Bibliography

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