

Introduction: Post-national social contract in the 21st century – a cross-disciplinary contribution to the political anthropology

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This special volume investigates the fate of the social contract in the contexts of the post-national order. Since at least the turn of the century, we have been witness to a profound de- and re-composition of the modern social bonds between the individual, the state and society. To name but the three most obvious patterns of change: first, the modern social contract depended on the idea of stable state territories and homogenous ethno-cultural communities; second, social bonds were nurtured through institutes of citizenship, membership and belonging, whereas rationalization of cultural heritage through processes of (re)traditionalization and collective memory production assured a socially cohesive understanding of public culture; third, the idea of the nation and nation-state formed a firm ground to elaborate and educate modern patriotic commitments, in particular the idea of the homeland. Since the 1970s, these three arrangements have been rapidly, and often silently, replaced by the “postmodern”, “neoliberal”, and “postnational” models of the social contract. State, regional and global re-bordering, changing of the paths and classes of migrations, and the collapse of the welfare state, have created conditions of permanent instability, fluidity and proliferation of contradictions in the relationship between the citizen and the state. This includes the fracturing of the democratic public sphere and value politics due to meaning contestation of key modern principles of solidarity, justice, and welfare, as well as a growing incommensurability between the post-humanitarian ethics of neoliberal consumer society and the rational choice agency ideal of the modern Enlightenment subject.

Ours, then, is the era of the post-national constellation. It has come unannounced and, as we stated above, often silently. Hence, the perception of the manifold sites of the “crisis”: of the welfare state, of the values, of the state, and of other factors: of the contract itself. Furthermore, the public outrage, coupled with a sense of betrayal by the state and its institutions, that has been spreading across the regions hit hardest by the 2008 global financial crisis, indicate how truly unprepared we have been to face this development, whereas the claim to recover modern social entitlements against the ravaging waves of the global capital discloses the depth of the naivete with which we entered the post-1989 era of the “end of history”.

The notion of the post-national constellation has become an accepted paradigm for framing the theoretical debates on the 21st century global social order. Thus far, little attention has been paid to the question of how the post-national in the sphere of political, cultural, and identity mapping of the social may affect the fate of the modern contract. This special volume aims to fill the gap in an interdisciplinary way. By including inter- and cross-disciplinary approaches, it proposes also a methodologically post-nationalist way of investigating the state of the current social contract; and the potentials for its democratic development in the changed contexts of the post-national social life.

This is done in theoretical and empirical ways. The contributions provide, in the first part, anthropological, philosophical, pedagogical and postfeminist inquiry into the concept of the modern contract; its current historical permutations; classroom articulations and accommodations in private life.

The opening essay begins by focusing on the other, rightly called the deprived minority of Europe. Authors Marushiakova and Popov look at the Roma and their over-a-century long struggle to even be considered a partner in the social contract by the dominant society. The authors argue that in order to map the post-national social contract that would be inclusive of the Roma, a new research paradigm is needed, one which would ‘break through the boundaries between the approach to them only as “community” or only as part of “society”, as well as to extend the research beyond the current state of the art.’

The article by Rok Svetlič continues by investigating the legacies of modern anthropological philosophy to illuminate the current challenges in understanding free individuals; the inquiry is set against the reflection on the philosophical paths to 20th century totalitarianism.

In a similarly historic retrospective, Mitja Sardoč researches the “standards” of the modern debate about patriotism to show how a major problem in what appears to be a debate run by an “autopilot” of customary disputes may in fact lie in the misunderstanding of key concepts, such as love, citizenship, identity, nationality, virtue, loyalty, unity, solidarity, etc. This is consistent with our introductory thesis about the collapse of the modern contract *qua* a semantic collapse of its key terms.

In my own study on the post-national sexual contract, I revisit the work of Carole Pateman and, through a selection of case studies in public perceptions of the global migrant domestic workers and Eastern “brides” to the West of Europe, analyse some misconceptions in the articulation of the modern sexual contract.

The second half of the volume brings to fore concrete empirical research upon which theoretical issues of the contract, and the related topics of identity, membership and belonging, can be elaborated.

The ethnographic study by Maruša Pušnik of memories and counter-memories in Slovenia, related to the traumatic episodes of WWII and post-war violence, as well as the nostalgic refashioning of Tito’s Yugoslavia, provides an important insight into the struggles over the meaning of history. Despite allegedly being “liberated” from the repressive regimes of memory and (state) amnesia, as Pušnik shows, people in post-socialist Slovenia still use the disputes over the past as a legitimizing source for the social power and sense of humanity in the present.

The “collision of memory” continues to feature in the setting of the ground for the contract with the present. This includes, as shown, questions of national loyalty and cultural identity. In her field study of the return of American Armenians to Armenia, Karolina Pawłowska traces the diaspora’s problems in re-integrating into Armenian society. The difficulties, as she points out, stem from the stereotypes about a past Armenia, which collide with the migrants’ expectations of the repatriation, and eventually erecting new boundaries and barriers between the two communities.

A conflict over identity also governs the organization of sport events which, as Małgorzata Z. Kowalska demonstrates on the case of the organization of Euro 2012 in the host city of Poznań, becomes a battle ground for the negotiation of local past and future between local community and the (entrepreneurial) state.

The studies, collected in this volume, finally, allow us to conclude with a preliminary proposal for the definition of the post-national contract. The post-national social contract reveals itself to be a continuation of a previously negotiated arrangement between the individual, the nation state and modern society which is now operating under changed conditions of trans-nationalisation, deterritorialisation, individualization, and the global economy. It is not a break from the (national) histories of the 19th and 20th centuries but rather a shift in the articulation of assumptions about the organization of social life. The shift itself depends on the uses of past vocabularies of consensual democracy to contain the current conflicts of the neoliberal, entrepreneurial state. In this capacity, it provides a historical form for the collective imagination of the post-national order, as well as a public reminder of how the social contract under the conditions of the modern nations state was never fully socially inclusive; and, through the spectre of the neoliberal global order, retroactively unveils why the modern arrangement of social justice was just and only provisional.

None of the two conclusions should prevent us, though, from continuing to search for new answers to the old dilemmas of social welfare, inclusion, democracy and solidarity, which, as conveyed in the attachment to the special issue, are the values on the lame. The attachment brings the dialogue between Zygmunt Bauman and Lilie Chouliaraki about the postmodern ethics. Conducted in writing prior to their visit to Ljubljana in May 2016, the dialogue speaks to the need to revisit the modern European contract once more.

As is clear from listening to the voice of the late intellectual giant of our modernity, Zygmunt Bauman, the major challenge to maintain values of humanity and dignity is yet to come.