



Why "Neoliberalism?" On Critique and Method*

An EUI Workshop

Organized by Ola Innset (HEC), Liam McHugh-Russell (LAW), Julia Rone (SPS)

March 17-18, 2016

Sala Europa, Villa Schifanoia
Sala del Capitolo, Badia Fiesolana

Over the last thirty years a growing body of scholarship across the social sciences has deployed and developed the concept and terminology of *neoliberalism*. Since exploding in the early 1990s, its usage has not only surpassed related terms (“libertarian” “Washington Consensus” “financialization”) in academic research but has enjoyed exceptional success in public discourses as well (Venugopal 2015). The term has been identified with a variety of large-scale processes and seemingly contradictory trends. As a policy agenda of liberalization and regulatory retrenchment, its implementation over the last thirty years has entailed a massive increase in the volume and complexity of legal rules (Vogel 1996, Braithwaite 2008). As a discourse rooted in the valorization of individual freedom, it has facilitated the consolidation of collective power and, in some contexts, justified the expansion of incarceration and surveillance (Brown 2015, Harcourt 2011). As a political project associated most often with Reagan and Thatcher's efforts to lower taxes and weaken labour power (Harvey 2005), its advance has coincided with a paradoxical combination of rising national inequality measures and a *flattening* of the global inequality distribution (Milanovic 2012).

What initially appeared as disagreements about the origins and causes of the neoliberal ascendance have now come into view as more fundamental divides over the nature of the

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concept itself. For some, neoliberalism is a set of economic policies enacted all over the world since the 1970s; for Marxists, the result of the resurgent power of global financial elites; for readers of Foucault, it names transformations of political rationality and subjectivity corresponding to an economization of all social life. (Flew 2014) These conceptualizations are nonetheless united by an implied periodization. Neoliberalism promises to mark off the present from the past, emphasizes the underlying continuity of capitalism, and evokes nostalgia for a post-WWII Golden Age. Given this unifying thread, differences in usage may reflect deeper differences about the salient aspects of social order, the nature of social change and proper governance of political order. Thus, debates over “neoliberalism” may serve as a proxy for more fundamental divisions over theory and norm, method and discipline.

Recent years have witnessed a number of countervailing trends. A growing genre of research has developed critiques of the concept's theoretical fungibility and drawn on the multiplicity of its valences in practice to seriously question its explanatory value. (Venugopal 2015, Boas & Gan-Morse 2009) Research depending on the concept has nonetheless continued to intensify, and to jump further across disciplinary lines, becoming a centre point of symposia and special collections in a number of fields (Grewal Purdy 2014, Birch Springer 2016) Finally, scholars have increasingly reached into the past, long before the crisis of the 1970s, to find institutional, philosophical and conceptual precursors of today's neoliberal practices. (Gane 2012, Kipnis 2008)

In the context of these trends, this workshop offers a momentary opportunity for methodological reflexivity. In an interdisciplinary group that includes historians and sociologists, legal scholars and moral philosophers, political scientists and others, participants will be invited to present, reframe and contextualize their own work in a way that reflects on the analytical, normative and critical value of “neoliberalism.” What insights does the term bring to sites of research left undertheorized by other concepts? Beyond naming and identifying aspects of the world, concepts draw things together and keep other things from view. What analytical connections does “neoliberalism” facilitate, and what processes does it obscure? What new spaces of understanding does the concept open up, and how? On the other hand, what are the risks and pitfalls of leaning too heavily on the term? When might it be time, to borrow a phrase, “to take a break from neoliberalism?” (c.f. Halley 2006). By providing a setting to compare approaches across methodological differences, we hope to not only map the uses of neoliberalism (Ferguson 2010), but to learn something about the origins of the present and, more broadly, about the promises of critically engaged social science.

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Agenda

Thursday, 17 March 2016 (Sala Europa, Villa Schifanoia)

17:00-18:30 **Public Lecture: The Political Movement that Dared Not Speak its Own Name**

Chair: Richard Bellamy (Director, Max Weber Program, EUI)

[Philip Mirowski](#) (Carl Koch Professor of Economics and the History and Philosophy of Science, University of Notre Dame)

Discussant: [Corinna Unger](#) (Professor of Global and Colonial History, European University Institute)

18:30-19:30 **Cocktail Reception (Sala Bandiere)**

20:00-22:00 Dinner (Speakers Only)

Friday, 18 March 2016 (Sala del Capitolo, Badia Fiesolana)

9:30-9:45 **Welcome and Motivation**

Ola Innset, Julia Rone, Liam McHugh-Russell

9:45-11:00 **Neoliberal Order as Historical Utopia**

Chair: Lucy Riall (Professor of Comparative History of Europe, EUI)

[Ola Innset](#) (Researcher, History, European University Institute): *Early Neoliberalism and the Dual Argument*

[João Rodrigues](#) (Lecturer and Researcher, Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra): *Spontaneous Order or Grand Scale Social Engineering? F. Hayek and the in-built federalism of neo-liberalism*

Discussants: Dimitri van der Meer (EUI, Department of Law)
Filipe Brito Bastos (EUI, Department of Law)

11:00-11:15 Coffee Break

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11:15-12:30 **Making States and Subjects in the Market Image**
 Chair: Agnieszka Smolenska (EUI, Law)

[Honor Brabazon](#) (Assistant Professor, Centre for Criminology and Sociolegal Studies, University of Toronto): *Neoliberal Legality: Discipline And Dissent*

[Muriam Davis](#) (Max Weber Fellow, European University Institute): *Can we Write a Colonial History of Neoliberalism? The Fifth Republic and the Creation of Homo Economicus in Algeria*

Discussants: Anna Chadwick (EUI, Department of Law)
 João Rodrigues (University of Coimbra)

12:30-13:45 Lunch (Sala Rossa, Badia Mensa)

13:45-15:00 **Neoliberalism as Practical Politics**
 Chair: Julia Rone (EUI, Social and Political Sciences)

[Laszlo Bruszt](#) (Professor of Sociology, European University Institute):
Building Market Societies on the European Periphery

[Cornel Ban](#) (Assistant Professor of International Relations; Co-Director of the Global Economic Governance Initiative, Boston University): *What do We Talk about When We Talk About Neoliberalism?*

Discussants: Philip Mirowski (University of Notre Dame)
 Joe Ganderson (EUI, Social and Political Sciences)

15:00-15:15 Coffee Break

15:15-16:30 **Panel Discussion: Taking a Break from Neoliberalism**

Why and when should we pass over “neoliberalism”? When do other discourses better serve our purposes? What risks are there in using the term?

- [Dennis Patterson](#) (Professor of Legal Theory and Legal Philosophy, EUI)
- [Youssef Cassis](#) (Professor of Economic History, EUI)
- [Arpad Abraham](#) (Professor of Macroeconomics, EUI)

16:30-16:45 **Closing Commentary and Reflections**

Chairs: Ola Innset, Julia Rone, Liam McHugh-Russell

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