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Transnational partisanship: idea and practice

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Transnational Partisanship: Idea and Practice

That parties might successfully organise transnationally is an idea often met with scepticism. The paper argues that while certain favourable conditions are indeed absent in the transnational domain, this implies not that partisanship is impossible but that it is likely to be marked by certain traits. Specifically, it will tend to be episodic, structured as a low-density network, and delocalised in its ideational content. These tendencies affect the normative expectations one can attach to it. Transnational partisanship should be valued as a transitional phenomenon, e.g. as a pathway to transnational democracy, more than as a desirable thing in itself.

Almost since the first emergence of the party as a political form, there have been partisans wanting to project their activities across borders. Routinely they have appealed to the transnational to describe the scale of their ambitions and unity of purpose, coupling their claims with practical efforts to coordinate with the like-minded abroad. For much of the twentieth century, France's socialists organised under the banner of the 'French Section of the Workers' International', a name that clearly stated an unwillingness to equate partisanship with the processes of representative democracy in the nation-state setting. A certain restlessness towards the domestic political stage has been characteristic of many a partisan tradition.

That such actors have often had limited success in their transnational designs has encouraged the larger portion of observers to meet these efforts with a mixture of scepticism and disregard. An outstanding question is whether transnational partisanship is a genuine proposition, something with an historical pedigree perhaps, or whether partisanship in any meaningful sense depends on conditions peculiar to the nation-state. While difficult to settle, the problem permits greater dissection than it has so far received. For those who can be convinced that transnational partisanship is feasible, perhaps the key question concerns its makeup. Are there distinctive tendencies one can expect it to display, as a function of its institutional, cultural and social universe? And how might these influence the normative value one can attach to it?

The present paper examines these questions in turn, but a prior one needs handling at the outset. How should we conceptualise partisanship, and its transnational form by extension? There are good reasons to avoid defining it simply as what party members do. From leaders to the rank and file, there will be many things members do for which their organisational affiliation is irrelevant, just as there will be those who are not members yet whose actions are intended to have significant bearing on a party's fortunes. At the transnational level especially, we may be interested in the interactions of those who do not share party membership, yet whose cooperation seems qualitatively different from a pact of expedience.

Instead of deriving the concept of partisanship from that of the party, I proceed with the following understanding of partisanship: as consisting in the sense of belonging to a community of shared commitments, and in the projects undertaken to advance these in coordination with others (White & Ypi 2011). The commitments that define such an attachment entail a particular conception of the public good and of how to shape public life accordingly. They range in abstraction from open-ended values, to the principles by which to interpret these, to concrete proposals for how to understand and realise them in a given time and place.[1] As well as direct efforts to promote the commitments the community is based on – typically by seeking control of decision-making institutions[2] – partisan activities involve cultivating the sense of community, e.g. through communication, and seeking to convince a wider public of its appeal. A *party* can be regarded as the organisational expression of these activities – the coordination partisans successfully achieve, the community given organised form.

Such a conception points to an understanding of transnational partisanship as when an imagined community of commitments and the activities it inspires overstep the boundaries of a nation-state.[3] This would occur when those involved see themselves (and act as though) they form one single supranational community of commitment, or when they consider (and act as though) the intra-national community of commitment to which they retain affiliation is nested alongside others within a larger community. In this way the agents involved may form a single, self-standing organisation, or be divided across multiple organisations that seek to harmonise activities.[4] Coordination of the first kind fits conventional understandings of a *transnational party*; coordination of the second kind can be regarded as a looser version of the same, to the extent it is grounded in shared commitments and therefore amounts to something more than a merely pragmatic arrangement based on temporarily convergent interests.

The suspicion that cross-border ties of this kind have been under-acknowledged points to some of the empirical reasons to reflect on the character and conditions of transnational partisanship. Possibly there is more of it than is commonly supposed, or possibly there will be more of it to come. The recent flurry of interest in the 'Merkozy'[5] phenomenon apparently reflects that thought, however much some commentators may overstate the novelty of what they describe. The figure of the partisan offers a reframing device rich in potential – a way to approach international relations using categories additional to the more familiar ones of the state, international organisation or NGO, and thereby to track some underexplored truths of the international realm.

But the prospects for transnational partisanship are worth exploring also because of the normative issues at stake. Chief amongst these is the challenge of shaping power structures

beyond the nation-state. Whether in the form of economic structures, relations of interdependence, or transnational decision-making institutions, a range of cross-border structures exercise power over the modern-day citizen. Rather than accept such power as a brute fact or denounce it ineffectually, people have reason to want to shape it so it coheres with ideas they find acceptable. Only then, runs the thought, will there be the prospect of rendering these structures legitimate.

Transnational partisanship presents itself as a potentially valuable means to achieve the necessary democratisation of power beyond the nation-state. While contemporary political philosophy has much to say on desirable goals, it generally has less to say on the real-world practices that might deliver these. Even in the rich literature on transnational democracy (*i.a.* Archibugi, Koenig-Archibugi and Marchetti 2011), partisanship is little discussed,[6] despite its distinctive qualities. The access of partisans to political institutions at the national level gives them a foundation of power and authority unavailable to other would-be politicising agents such as social movements, allowing them to create and reshape transnational governmental institutions. Their visibility in national politics gives them an influence over public debates unmatched by judicial elites. Furthermore, actors who define themselves in terms of programmatic goals promise a normative intelligibility to their actions, in contrast to those of technical experts. In all these respects, and in the right hands, transnational partisanship represents a potentially important pathway to progressive change.[7] While many of the political actors habitually called parties have displayed well-catalogued failings, this reflects not just the practical challenges of political organisation but the casual way 'party' is deployed in analysis, often to include groups whose basis in shared commitment is negligible. However mixed the existing record, the partisan route to political reform holds promise. The extent to which it can deliver on this promise transnationally is one of the paper's guiding concerns.

Partisanship and scope: is the nation-state arena special?

If we understand partisanship as the sense of belonging to a community of shared commitments, and the coordinated steps taken to advance these, then the *scope* of partisanship will be set by the extension of those who recognise each other as belonging to the same community and the extension of their coordinated activity.[8] In this section I examine whether that scope might plausibly extend beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, or conversely whether this arena is somehow special. In debates concerning the possibility of transnational democracy, it is asked

3

whether democracy has necessary conditions (Koenig-Archibugi 2011). The same question can be posed of partisanship.[9] I shall consider three sceptical theses: first, that partisanship requires an enabling institutional environment; second, that it requires the existence of generalised social ties; and third, that it requires cross-spatial continuity in the structure of political division. Such conditions have been present in the nation-state, the sceptic will argue, but are absent in the transnational realm.

In the following discussion I assume, like the sceptic, that conclusions can be drawn for transnational partisanship from partisanship in the nation-state. However, the conclusions I draw are different. Not only must one not overstate the importance of certain features of the nation-state, but one must avoid an idealised conception of it that exaggerates the peculiarities of the transnational realm (cf. Little and MacDonald 2013).

1. An enabling institutional environment

Several institutional features are conventionally associated with the modern state, including a decision-making structure governed by the principle of sovereignty, a generally accepted executive authority, and a bounded territorial space (Poggi 1990, ch. 2; Tilly 1975). The *democratic* version of the state is furthermore generally said to include a powerful legislature and a constitutional framework providing institutional rules that give voice to political opposition.

This is the type of institutional framework some would argue is partisanship's necessary condition. An executive body able to make authoritative demands for a given territorial space, backed by coercive power, would appear the indispensible means by which partisans can shape public life in line with the commitments on which they are agreed (cf. Patomäki 2011).[10] Without the authority of office, and a jurisdiction coextensive with partisan activities, the effort to make commitments socially binding would seem to require untold resources of coercion. A parliamentary arena would likewise seem indispensible, offering partisans not only legislative power but a public setting in which to justify their actions and engage opponents, resources by which to retain their corporate identity when out of office, and an electoral process coextensive with the scale of their operations by which they can make an authoritative claim to represent a constituency. These institutions, it may be said, are either absent at the transnational level, or under-developed to the extent they preclude these possibilities. Arguments of the latter sort are made by observers of the EU, who suggest its decision-making is too diffuse, and its Parliament too weak, for meaningful transnational partisanship to occur (Bartolini 2005, p.336ff.).

This view well captures some favourable conditions for partisanship: that they are necessary conditions is less clear. True, an historical pattern might suggest so. The eighteenth-

and nineteenth-century emergence of parties in Europe and beyond typically depended not only on a pre-existing centralised institutional framework inherited from the monarchical age, but also on emerging processes of parliamentarisation and suffrage-expansion (Scarrow 2006). Democratic institutions generally came first, at least before parties as organisations.[11] Yet the history of state formation also tells us partisanship was sometimes crucial exactly to these processes of democratisation (cf. Rosenblum 2008, pp.92ff.). Whether one looks to the Jacobins, the Federalists or Mazzini's Young Italy, one finds cases of partisans leading the transformation of political institutions, weakening attachments to the old order and refashioning it in line with declared commitments. To be sure, they were not yet embedded in anything one might call a party system, and belonged to an age when few endorsed ideas of legitimate opposition (Hofstadter 1969, ch. 2; Sartori 1976, introduction). They were not democratic actors by the standards of later history, but indicate that partisan communities of commitment may emerge even in the absence of the favourable conditions described.

One will doubt the relevance of this analogy if one sees the transnational realm as lacking not just democratic institutions but executive institutions more generally. The context then becomes quite different from the early-modern setting. But just as one should reject a view of the modern state as offering partisanship a readymade institutional environment, the contemporary transnational realm can hardly be pictured as an institutional vacuum. Certainly there are few structures bar the European Parliament designed to be arenas of transnational partisanship. There are though, of course, numerous intergovernmental forums of diverse kinds (Goodin 2010, p.201), which for the partisan offer possibilities for contact-formation as well as opportunities to wield executive power. Institutions exist, even if those of representative democracy are absent or weak. Moreover, transnational institutions exist in parallel with national ones. At critical moments, as the next section explores, these latter offer a significant basis for transnational partisanship, including opportunities to establish cross-border institutions. National institutions also mean that while, in the absence of transnational electoral mechanisms, partisans cannot claim authorisation from a transnational constituency, they are by no means deprived of procedural sources of legitimacy.

It may be said that precisely the institutional pluralism characteristic of the transnational realm is what poses the problem. Would-be partisans find themselves pulled between competing sites of action: they will need to prioritise among them, and will typically concentrate on the national arena given existing electoral incentives. Is institutional pluralism a better reason to doubt the feasibility of transnational partisanship?[12] Such an argument would require us to view allegiance to a wider community of commitments as necessarily incompatible with activities on

the scale of the state. The claim seems too strong. Certainly there may be occasions when the two collide – for instance, when the alignment of political forces is such that operations on a transnational scale might jeopardise the advancement of goals domestically. But there may also be occasions when the opposite holds: when the commitments to which a set of partisans adheres can only adequately be advanced by working with like-minded parties abroad. I return to this point in the next section. For now, let us hold the thought that the institutional barriers to transnational partisanship are significant but not necessarily decisive.

2. *Strong social ties*

A second line of scepticism towards transnational partisanship centres on the social ties said to underpin viable political associations of all kinds. Some see these as rooted in shared culture: a combination of locally valued markers to do with territory, language, ritual, history and descent that establish a sense of unity amongst individuals (Miller 2000, Kymlicka 2001). For others, they take the form of dispositions to show trust and solidarity, not necessarily grounded in a sense of cultural belonging (Offe 1999; for critical discussion, Bader 2006). In both cases such ties are considered typically shared by most members of a nation-state, and typically not shared, certainly with anything like the same intensity, with those across borders.

In the well-rehearsed debates on the socio-cultural preconditions of democracy, broadly two kinds of significance are ascribed to these social ties: functional and ethical (White 2010). Arguably the former poses the less demanding challenge for transnational partisanship, for in principle it permits technical solution. Partisan coordination, on this line of thinking, requires a widely shared medium of communication, plus opportunities for person-to-person interaction. Multilingual and geographically extended contexts might therefore seem unsuited. However, insofar as we treat these only as functional challenges (and not as proxies for ethical ties), remedies can be imagined, centred on communication technology or a lingua franca (van Parijs 2011). Such remedies may be highly imperfect (Archibugi 2008, ch. 10), but they affect the *character* of transnational partisanship – e.g. its inclusiveness – rather than its very possibility (cf. below). Importantly, no-one has reason to resist such solutions if they work, because no value is accorded to the social divisions that produced the 'problem' they aim to solve.

It is where social ties are given ethical significance that the real test for transnational partisanship lies. The argument might be as follows: only those already sharing an extensive set of social norms and dispositions to show trust and solidarity will be willing to come together as a partisan community of commitment. Social ties precede this form of political association. The same foundation might be considered necessary for partisans credibly to claim the support of a

constituency. In the absence of such social bonds, potential constituents might be thought unlikely to be moved by partisan efforts to build unity, perhaps even liable to reject their claims as the claims of foreign agents. Such arguments are typically invoked to explain the failure of the pacifist strands of early-twentieth-century socialist parties to sustain cross-border mobilisation against war, and ultimately to account for the collapse of the Second International (Neiberg 2011, pp.102ff.).[13] Partisanship, one infers, depends on the kinds of social tie only typically displayed by those who are fellow nationals.

That such a view rests on an idealised conception of national society seems clear. In its image of bounded homogeneity, one detects a major simplification (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2002). The conditions of national partisanship were never so tidy: partisans have always contended with cross-cutting social divisions. But even if we embrace the need to stylise, it can equally be argued strong social ties have been the *consequence* of partisanship as much as its precondition. In parts of nineteenth-century Europe, socialist parties were not so much undercut by nationalist sentiment as one of the driving forces in its production (Hobsbawm 1992, pp.124ff.). The social integration of the United States has likewise been narrated as driven significantly by partisan efforts to expand the scope of their activities from the local to the national level so as to further their political goals (Schattschneider 1975). Conversely, there are instances of partisans coordinating to truncate social ties: Czechoslovakia, in the years between the fall of communism in 1989 and the state's dissolution in 1993, stands as an interesting case of this.[14] Even a partisanship that presents itself as devoted to the protection of existing ties – a conservative nationalism, for example – may involve successful efforts to redefine the scope of social ties, and indeed may rely on coordinated action that oversteps the boundaries of the nation-state to achieve this end: the granting of passports to minorities in other countries has been one way ruling parties in Central and Eastern Europe have imprinted themselves on the social landscape in recent years (Körtvélyesi 2012, pp.138ff.). In such ways the special ties that fellow nationals are typically thought to share can be regarded, sometimes at least, as endogenous to partisan activity (cf. Little & MacDonald 2013, pp.800ff.).

3. Continuity in the structure of political division

The partisan community is a community of shared commitments. This points to a third line of scepticism towards transnational partisanship. Commitments, it may be said, are contextual. They, and the lines of opposition they inspire, emerge in specific socio-political settings. While a stable and agreed structure of political division may develop within the confines of an integrated order such as the nation-state, there may be quite limited continuity of structure from

one such setting to another. Hence one has little reason to expect a genuine convergence of commitments at the transnational level.

Such an argument can take several forms. For some, the structure of political division is a function of social structure, e.g. of class or religious cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). While structurally similar cleavages may recur across space, their precise content and their modes of interaction will differ from one site to another, due to the historical contingencies of state-formation and socio-economic development. Nation-states taken individually may exhibit a class structure, but these will not aggregate to form a transnational class structure. Hence if political divisions reflect class divisions, the commitments endorsed in one setting may have little resonance elsewhere. Alternatively, the argument may focus on political culture: the ideological traditions from which commitments emerge, even if not derivative of social facts, nonetheless develop within a context. What counts as conservatism, socialism, liberalism or environmentalism will differ across space, not least because these traditions take shape in the context of struggles with local adversaries. Not only the meaning of specific traditions but the structure of the field as a whole – what is Left, Right and Centre – may vary considerably (Bartolini 2005). Again, without commensurate structures of political division, the possibility of transnational partisan communities of commitment may be doubted.

It is important to question whether cross-national differences are actually so sharp. A sizeable literature in the comparative politics of Europe suggests the opposite: that 'the compatibility of national party systems is relatively pronounced' (Mair and Thomassen 2010, p.29; cf. Bardi et al 2010, pp.7ff). The same has been said of politics globally: that the continuities are sufficiently strong as to permit the universal application of the Left-Right scheme (Noël and Thérien 2009). Such authors do not deny local variation and cross-cutting divisions, but dispute their primacy. To sustain the idea of transnational partisanship, it should be emphasised, does not require endorsing the strongest claims for isomorphism. It may be that some political traditions are less transnationally coherent than others (a point discussed below). As long as there are *some* traditions – perhaps even just one – for which cross-border continuity exists, transnational partisanship remains on the cards.

Furthermore, as always, one must avoid overstating the simplicity of the nation-state. A measure of disagreement on the structure of political division is apparent at this level too (White 2011). The notion that political divides are an unmediated reflection of social or political-cultural structures has been well criticised (Gallagher, Laver and Mair 2006, ch. 9). What constitutes an ideological tradition, and how it relates to others, has always been to some degree a matter of interpretation – a point that leaves scope for partisan creativity in how the contours of

the political landscape are drawn (White 2012). Political traditions depend on a necessarily precarious claim to unity. Transnationally as well as nationally, there may be discontinuities which turn out to be too great to bridge. The limits to political creativity are real, but where exactly these lie is an open-ended question that resists being determined *ex ante*.

Tendencies in transnational partisanship

We may conclude from the preceding discussion that none of the three factors considered, concerning institutional structures, social ties, and the structure of political division, can be treated as a necessary condition of partisanship.[15] Partisans have navigated their way around them. Yet to discount these issues altogether would be rash. Each claim, I suggest, captures a truth about the pressures to which transnational partisanship is subject.

The present section builds on the preceding analysis to identify a series of influences on the forms transnational partisanship takes. It highlights the *tendencies* (Mill 1904, pp.585ff.) to which the latter is prone. Specifically, it is suggested (1) that the absence or incompleteness of an enabling institutional environment tends to produce an episodic form of partisanship; (2) that the absence of strong social ties inclines it towards the structure of a low-density network; (3) that the persistence of discontinuities in the structure of political division points towards a partisanship which is ideationally delocalised. The section develops each point in turn. The implications for the kinds of political good one can expect of transnational partisanship are examined in the final section.

For these observations, the implied point of contrast is national partisanship. Clearly there are pitfalls here. Political scientists emphasise the diversity of forms taken by national partisanship, and often work with a typology that emphasises historical change (Katz and Mair 2009). How can something so varied be a benchmark? The problem affects all work using abstract political concepts, especially those that combine empirical and normative dimensions: studies of democracy, citizenship and the law face similar challenges. My assumption is that the tendencies described here differentiate transnational partisanship from most of its national incarnations, however varied the latter may be. I do not exclude however that there may be contemporary forms of national partisanship which, partly because they too are exposed to transnational influences, bear some of the same patterns.

1. Episodic

I have suggested the transnational domain departs from the institutional arrangement of the modern state, not due to the absence of state-like features altogether, but due to their existence in plural form. Institutional pluralism is a fact of the international sphere. While this need not inhibit the formation of cross-border partisan communities and practices of coordination between them, it does, I propose, encourage the latter to appear at quite uneven levels of intensity, creating a distinctively episodic partisan form.

Whereas in the modern state the executive and the legislature provide a permanent focal-point for parties of government and opposition, in the transnational setting partisans must control multiple institutions simultaneously if they are to wield something approaching equivalent power. Representation of the like-minded in several governments at once is crucial, particularly if they must contend also with powerful non-governmental actors and non-majoritarian institutions. Partisan coordination is therefore likely to be an irregular phenomenon, strongest when a temporary alignment of political forces creates a window of opportunity to influence policy-making. Of course, not all partisan coordination is geared to executing authority: there may be ongoing coordination of a low-level kind, designed to build contacts, share knowledge with counterparts further afield, and cultivate the partisan community of commitment.[16] Efforts in conjunction with other actors of civil society to challenge hegemonic ideas and reshape political commonsense, along the lines of Gramsci's 'war of position' (Gramsci 1971, p.238), also belong to this category. Non-governing parties can do much to politicise problems and to project themselves as a cross-border unity.[17] The twentieth-century experience of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Syria and Jordan shows as much: but it also suggests that without a basis in institutional power the extent of their practical coordination may be limited (Rubin 2010, pp.9ff.). Intense transnational partisanship is likely to be intermittent, comprising a series of momentary achievements based on favourable political alignments.

An instructive example can be found in 1950s Europe, when Christian Democratic parties came to power in a number of states simultaneously. At this time there was no transnational institutional framework of the kind later known as the European Union: on the contrary, it was this alignment of political forces which *produced* the early steps of European integration. Cross-border Christian-Democratic cooperation had existed for some time, with individuals attached to national parties founding several transnational partisan organisations, notably the Secrétariat International des Partis Démocratiques d'Inspiration Chrétienne (1925), the Nouvelles Equipes Internationales (1947) and Geneva Circle (Gehler & Kaiser 2001; Pulzer 2004). When, from 1950, Christian Democratic parties were in power in France, Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries, a favourable conjuncture existed for the intensification of cross-national activity.

Growing tensions with the Soviet Union, and the outbreak of the Korean War, added urgency. Over the following years, a highly consequential form of transnational partisanship developed, personally in the form of informal networks amongst elites, and ideologically based on a mix of 'traditional confessional notions of occidental culture and anti-communism and broadly liberal economic ideas' (Kaiser 2007, p.10). Several features of early European integration – including the federalist ambitions and the protection of the politically important agrarian interest – have been ascribed to Christian-Democratic concerns (Kaiser 2007, pp.228ff.; Kalyvas & van Kersbergen 2010, pp.195-6). This Centre-Right transnational partisanship lasted until the 1960s, when Christian Democratic parties lost power at the national level. It was episodic in character, able to overcome the absence of formal institutions at the transnational level for as long as there was an alignment of political forces at the national level.

While Christian-Democratic transnationalism provides a particularly clear illustration, this episodic tendency is detectable more widely. Recent Latin American history provides an instructive example. Elections in the late 1990s and 2000s in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador brought to power leftist partisans united by a common set of political commitments centred on anti-neoliberalism, social justice and mass participation (Ellner 2012; Panizza 2009, pp.183ff.).[18] Under the banner of 'twenty-first-century socialism', they went on to coordinate actively amongst themselves and with sympathetic parties in Cuba and Nicaragua to revive the transnationalism of the Socialist Internationals.[19] Amongst the institutional achievements of this socialist alignment have been the formation of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA, 2004), the establishment of a virtual regional currency known as the SUCRE (2010), and, in cooperation with more moderate centre-left parties in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay, the creation of UNASUR (the Union of South American Nations, 2008) (Ellner 2012, p.104; Angosto-Ferrández 2013).[20] A highly consequential form of transnational partisanship has thus been possible given a favourable alignment of political forces. As further examples one might point to a political alignment of the New Right in Europe and the US in the 1980s,[21] and of the Third-Way Left in the 1990s,[22] which saw like-minded governing parties similarly coordinating to pursue common agendas, again leaving their mark on the course of European integration.[23]

One of the important implications of this episodic tendency is that only occasionally can one expect to see multiple partisan formations existing in a relationship of adversarial confrontation. When one speaks of a 'party system' in the context of the state, one tends to picture relatively enduring structured oppositions (cf. Sartori 1976). The institutions of the state facilitate this, offering semi-permanent representation to parties of government and opposition,

and various timetables and cycles to choreograph their encounter. While transnational partisan formations *may* arise simultaneously, this is unlikely to be the norm – not least since being in government at the national level is both a major advantage and one not all can share. Transnational partisanship will generally be asymmetrical, in other words: there is little reason to expect coordinated conflict between more than one formation. It will typically be partisanship without a party system.[24]

Over the long term, however, these episodes of transnational partisanship may leave enduring structuring effects. A transnational partisan community may depend on a favourable political alignment at the national level for its emergence, but it is likely to leave traces that considerably outlive that alignment. Episodes of intense coordination generally leave behind residual organisational structures which, even if they lack the original dynamism, can be a focal-point for future activities and the symbolic expression of a transnational community of commitments.[25] Those who mobilise once may find it easier to mobilise again: incrementally, a more permanent configuration may emerge (Goodin 2010, pp.197ff.). Insofar as they embed certain commitments in institutions with coercive powers (cf. the 'social market' ideals that attached to the EC/EU long after the demise of Christian Democracy as a transnational force), their influence may again be lasting. Transnational partisanship may be conjunctural, but its effects are anything but transient.

2. *A Low-Density Network Structure*

It was suggested above that, contra certain understandings of the nation-state, the transnational social field can hardly be conceived in terms of generalised ties knitting individuals together in a society of even density. This image of bounded homogeneity does not apply, yet partisanship of a kind remains possible. We may develop this thought by borrowing some of the language of network theory (Kadushin 2011). Transnational partisanship will tend to exhibit the structure of a low-density network, where this entails a series of fairly discrete social clusters, bridged by a few nodal individuals.[26] It may furthermore display fuzzy boundaries and indistinctness of form, and low public recognition or 'entitativity' – points we may consider in turn.

Transnational partisanship must generally contend with a number of social divisions, notably language. These divisions will be less pronounced amongst certain clusters of individuals: partisans of the same locality or nationality can be expected to display a relatively dense set of ties, thus forming integrated groups. But the links between these groups may depend on a relatively small number of individuals, or 'nodes', whose activities bridge what would otherwise remain separate spheres. For instance, multilingualism will be needed for

transnational partisan coordination, but is a capacity only a minority of partisans may possess. The same holds of personal contacts with counterparts in other countries, or detailed familiarity with their history and traditions. Only a minority will be in a position to cultivate direct communicative links spanning the whole of the transnational partisan community. Segmentation is the norm. Such a description fits well the transnational partisanship of Christian Democracy described in the previous section.[27] The larger community of commitment tends to be a largely imagined one for the majority of partisans – though 'weak ties' may be highly consequential nonetheless (Granovetter 1973).

One possible conclusion is that transnational partisanship will therefore tend to be elitist, dependent as it is on a relatively small number of crucial individuals. While its component parts (national and local partisan groups) may be participative – as in the case of Latin-American socialism – the coordination pursued transnationally may be less so. Such a phenomenon has been observed both for yesterday's Internationals and today's NGOs (Archibugi 2008, p.255). Still, while transnational partisanship may start as an elite phenomenon, one should not exclude that over time it may become more participative, for instance as a consequence of exchange programmes and other concerted efforts to cultivate the community of commitment (the Latin-American example is instructive again).

There are two other implications of the network structure of transnational partisanship. One is that the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in partisan activity may be blurred. In the context of the nation-state, these boundaries have typically been associated with organisational membership. The image of a bounded (*socio-centric*) network does not fit transnational partisanship: it is better conceived as *open* (Kardushin 2011, p.17). Such a network lacks sharp borders: it takes only a single tie to draw an actor into the network, and the network may already be dependent on monads at key interfaces. In practical terms this means a range of actors who are not party members may be entwined in the activities of transnational partisanship: NGOs, social movements, public intellectuals, the media, etc. While the boundaries of partisanship may be increasingly blurred at the national level too (White & Ypi 2011), this is likely to be the norm when we encounter transnational partisanship. The partisan community – both as imagined by partisans and as practically expressed – will generally display an indistinctness of form.

A further, related implication is that it may tend to have low public recognition beyond the partisan community itself. A network of the kind described is formed of a series of personal relationships, not necessarily underpinned by such structural abstractions as offices and roles, or generalised systems of communication. It is likely to lack 'entativity' (Campbell 1958), i.e. the public perception that it is an entity more than the sum of its parts. This follows also from the

institutional points already considered: the lack of a parliamentary arena and electoral process, and partisanship's corresponding episodic character. Instances of transnational partisanship such as those already touched on – post-War Christian Democracy, the activities of the New Right and Third Way, even twenty-first-century socialism – fit this pattern of limited public recognition. Of course, sometimes low visibility may be deliberately sought, sometimes deliberately avoided. The tendency can be managed, but it seems real nonetheless.

3. Ideationally Delocalised

It was suggested transnational partisanship is likely to run up against differences in the structure of political division. While it may be too demanding to posit continuity of structure as partisanship's necessary condition, nonetheless partisans face a challenge in carving sufficient continuity to understand themselves as part of a transnational community of commitments. Frequently that challenge may not be met. The difficulty of reconciling differences of tradition may encourage partisans to push commitments to the margins so as to focus on pragmatic cooperation.[28] But where the challenge is met and transnational partisanship is real, it will tend to be *ideationally delocalised* in character.

By this I mean the commitments advanced transnationally will have no more than a loose relation with a particular geographical setting. This is true partly in a genetic sense: they will be significantly detached from the contexts in which they were originally conceived. While programmes associated with conservatism, social democracy, liberalism and the like can be articulated at a transnational level, they will necessarily be abstracted from the local circumstances (conflicts, problems) in which they emerged and developed. Delocalisation will apply also to the constituency to whom these commitments are promoted: less and less are they likely to correspond to a locally defined social group. It has been suggested delocalisation is one of the important processes affecting contemporary ideologies today, and one liable to destabilise them, dilute them and weaken their popular resonance (Freeden 2005, pp.257-8). Delocalised can mean deracinated: much of the partisanship in the European Parliament would seem to bear out that thought.

Yet delocalisation need not be destructive. It may enrich a set of commitments by adding to their diversity (Freeden 2005, p.258). This, after all, is one of the advantages typically associated with a low-density network: its weak ties allow new ideas to spread far and quickly (Granovetter 1973). It may also be the occasion for partisans to exercise creativity, developing narratives by which to translate and bridge divergent traditions, reframing them without negating them so as to comprehend them as part of a larger unity. This is one way to understand the

14

intellectual activity of Latin America's 'twenty-first-century socialists', who have sought to resituate nationally-formed understandings of community, solidarity and exploitation within a larger framework by drawing on ideas of a shared pre-Spanish indigenous culture, the common experience of colonialism and rebellion, the iconography of pan-regional figures such as Simón Bolívar and Antonio José de Sucre, and cross-border adversaries in the form of neoliberalism and US power (Ellner 2012, p.107; Goldfrank 2009, p.46; Hawkins 2010, pp.56ff.). Political claims thereby come to be reformulated in generalisable terms rather than with reference only to the interests of a national group.

Whether all political orientations *can* be reframed in transnational terms is an interesting secondary question. Arguably there are forms of nationalist thought which will always struggle to do so, e.g. because they define themselves against their neighbours.[29] Conversely, political traditions such as Christian Democracy, socialism or Islamism, however divergent nationally, do at least aspire towards being a transnational community of commitments.[30] There may also be traditions which, though universal appeal is claimed of them, turn out to be more closely tied to the viewpoint of a particular constituency than is acknowledged (some forms of liberalism may fit this description). The transnationalisation of partisanship arguably tends to filter out the more parochial orientations which cannot credibly articulate themselves in generalisable terms.

The normative point of transnational partisanship

It has been suggested transnational partisanship will tend to be episodic, characterised by the structure of a low-density network, and delocalised in its ideational content. In this final section I offer some remarks concerning what this implies for the goods it can be expected to deliver. As previously, it is assumed that nothing closely resembling the socio-political structure of the nation-state exists at a global or regional level. Should the background conditions discussed in the first section change – e.g. with the emergence of strong transnational representative institutions, with the deepening of cross-national social ties, or with spontaneous convergence in the structure of political division – then the tendencies discussed in the second section would have to be reappraised. I do not exclude that, in certain parts of the world at least, some such changes may be underway, but assume they remain in embryo.

The argument advanced is that, under these conditions, transnational partisanship retains some distinctive merits. Amongst the goods it may serve are the reshaping of existing power structures and the creation of new institutions, possibly including those of transnational

democracy. Importantly, it connects such projects to the actors and processes of national politics. But given the tendencies to which it is prone, it will generally produce such goods in a way that escapes systematic contestation, often with limited public visibility and participation. It cannot be considered a satisfactory end-state in itself, but should be defended in terms of the transformations it may yield.

The analysis of the preceding section underscores some of the distinctive qualities of transnational partisanship. Its dependence on political alignments at the national level, though this inhibits its continued expression, ensures the pursuit of transnational projects is rooted in national political processes. Transnational partisans derive a degree of procedural legitimacy unmatched by other would-be agents of the transnational realm, including social movements or scientist-advocates, whose democratic credentials have often been questioned (e.g. Tallberg and Uhlin 2011). The underpinning of state power, even if temporary, furthermore adds effectiveness: acting in coordination at critical moments, transnational partisans can use governmental authority to significantly alter existing arrangements and to create lasting transnational institutions. The Christian Democrats of 1950s Europe, and the leftists of 2000s Latin America, amply show this capacity. One may doubt whether those committed to non-state approaches can be effective to the same degree (Katz 2013, pp.45-6).

That transnational partisanship tends towards the structure of a low-density network is also the source of certain advantages. Though the connections between national parties may be limited to a few individuals, they serve to link what would otherwise remain separate political spheres. These networks expose partisans to the unfamiliar, linking them to counterparts whose knowledge and experiences are different to theirs – the classic argument for the strength of weak ties (Granovetter 1973). Whether one sees this in terms of mutual learning and information sharing – one of the purposes of the Socialist Internationals – or as the condition of decisive intervention in international affairs, it represents one of the assets of cross-border partisanship. Parties at the national level provide the established channels of communication and organisation by which to disseminate these influences and maintain them.

We have also noted the tendency in transnational partisanship towards ideational delocalisation. This too is normatively significant. As partisans develop narratives by which to understand the cross-border unity of their activities, they must find ways to reframe national political traditions in terms outsiders can find meaningful. That the structure of political division is not sharply discontinuous is the condition of their succeeding; that it is not perfectly continuous is a stimulus to their creativity. By locating familiar commitments in a wider scheme, transnational partisans engage in a process of de-parochialisation.[31] With its

combination of appeals to national and indigenous tradition with socialist universalism, Latin America's 'pink tide' well expresses this. If such a process filters out perspectives which do not permit generalisation, it exercises a deliberative function.

I have emphasised the positive qualities of transnational partisanship, ones which should enhance its standing relative to other forms of transnational activism as well as partisanship in the nation-state setting. They deserve emphasis as they are generally overlooked by theorists of democracy and transnational democracy alike. But the analysis also alerts us to problems. Consider, for instance, the further implications of episodicity. That cross-border political alignments are transitory inhibits the formation of a stable opposition, and hence the organised contestation of decision-making. The transnational sphere lacks institutional mechanisms for enabling partisan formations to appear in plural and adversarial form. It is not that transnational partisanship will necessarily go uncontested: it may be opposed, but in a disorganised and asymmetrical fashion (e.g. by national parties acting alone). It is unlikely to be systematically contested by opposition organised to the same scale; hence some of the arguments for partisanship's debate-enhancing qualities do not apply (Muirhead 2006, Rosenblum 2008). Its tendency to adopt a network structure likewise qualifies its appeal. While transnational partisanship offers some potential as a mechanism of popular participation, broadening access to sites of decision-making power, its direct links to the citizen are generally weak. Unlike at the national level, one struggles to see it as the source of a democratic ethos (White & Ypi 2010). Its delocalised schemes of self-understanding also risk weakening the tie to the citizenry, insofar as an esoteric politics may follow. The party risks detaching itself from its followers when it should remain 'only one step in front' (Lukács 1924 / 1977).

Under the conditions described, transnational partisanship is best conceived as a transformative mechanism rather than an intrinsically desirable state of affairs. It is a potential pathway to progressive change, including transnational democracy, without itself being an adequate democratic form. Through its activities may emerge the institutions that allow a more organised contestation of decision-making to take place.[32] Not unlike the first parties of the eighteenth century, in this sense it would have a revolutionary aspect, changing the background conditions under which it emerged. If we accept there is a paradox of founding, such that democracies are never established by wholly democratic means, its imperfect democratic credentials would hardly be a departure. Indeed, as a transformative mechanism, it is probably more democratic than most.

To be sure, there will be instances of transnational partisanship whose programmatic goals are suspect. Undesirable transformations of global politics, including ones in no sense

geared to transnational democracy, can be achieved by this means too – arguably the message of 'Merkozy'. Transnational partisanship deserves to be thematised for its dangers as well as its potential. In the last instance, though, one may doubt whether desirable transformations can adequately be achieved without it. Such is the activity's rationale.

Conclusion

Partisanship describes the sense of belonging to a community of shared commitments and the active steps taken to advance these in coordination with others. It can be said to be *transnational* when these attachments overstep the boundaries of a nation-state. Is transnational partisanship purely conjectural? As I have highlighted, there are at least three sceptical lines of argument. The transnational realm may be regarded an inhospitable environment for partisanship on account of its not being coextensive with a) enabling political institutions; b) strong social ties; c) continuity in the structure of political division.

None seems to capture a necessary condition. Partisans have long negotiated situations in which these conditions were unfulfilled. But each thesis does capture certain facts about the transnational realm relevant to the forms transnational partisanship is likely to take. The lack of strong institutions coextensive with the field of partisan activity means partisanship will tend to be episodic. The irregularity of social ties is likely to favour partisanship taking the structure of a low-density network. Irregularity in the structure of political division means it will depend on a delocalised ideational frame to evoke its programmatic unity.

These tendencies are important for how we identify the normative point of transnational partisanship. Of necessity it will be tightly bound to the procedures of national politics, deriving from these a significant quantity of both legitimacy and power. Its structure is conducive to the communication of ideas and practices across hitherto disconnected political arenas, and speed and decisiveness of coordinated action. Its delocalised programmatic thrust contributes to the resituating of national political traditions in a wider normative scheme. In all these respects it can make a valuable contribution to reshaping the international realm, advancing projects aimed at remedying injustice and establishing new institutions. Yet equally it is an imperfect democratic form. One struggles to see it as a desirable thing in itself. It should be valued rather as part of a process of change, a pathway to a more satisfactory order.

While transnational partisanship has been the focus of discussion, let us conclude with the observation that partisanship at the national level in some respects increasingly resembles its

transnational variant. It too has to contend with the weaknesses of political institutions, including the marginalisation of legislatures before executive power, and shows traces of an episodic tendency, as its activities intensify around electoral campaigns and recede at other moments. It too has to contend with uneven social ties – the often-observed weakening of collective identities in post-industrial societies, and increasing levels of cultural diversity – and displays tendencies towards an elitist structure. It too has to contend with the redrawing of lines of political division and the need to develop bridging narratives of wide appeal – witness the challenges posed by electoral de-alignment. Thinking about transnational partisanship is one way to think about the future of national partisanship, not least because of the many ways cross-border currents intrude on the domestic. Pursuing the transnational parallel further, perhaps it is not exaggerated to suggest that one of the major challenges facing national partisanship in coming years will be the remaking of democracy's institutional and social conditions. If so, what is pursued at the transnational level need not be thought of as coming at the expense of existing achievements at the national, since the latter are in no sense assured.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] No particular level of abstraction should be considered defining. Some partisan communities will rest on more clearly specified commitments than others: what matters is that their members accept the claim to unity.

[2] The desire to harness institutional power is an important way partisanship differs from other forms of movement activism. While usually this means efforts to *control* institutions, it may also mean efforts to *create* them.

[3] The implication is that these boundaries persist in some form, not that they are effaced altogether.

[4] The context of emergence is likely to be relevant: e.g. whether transnational partisanship takes shape as an incremental extension of existing national partisan traditions – a coalescence model – or whether it emerges unmediated by existing activities, e.g. in response to a one-off transnational shock or as part of the evolution of a transnational epistemic community without ties to existing parties.

[5] The term 'Merkozy' was coined by the European press in 2011 to describe the increasingly close cooperation between French President Nicholas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel as they crafted a response to the Euro crisis. The expression suggested a personal tie: *Bild Zeitung* referred to them as a 'power couple', while the *Daily Telegraph* evoked a 'marriage of convenience', visualising it with a composite image of their faces (Blome & Hoeren 2011, Cooper 2011). Despite the media's tendency to individualise the connection, some observers saw the makings of something deeper. Here, they suggested, was an alignment of political forces grounded in shared outlook: two Centre-Right governing parties coordinating to advance a shared conception of how the EU's future

should look. When Merkel announced she would actively assist Sarkozy's re-election campaign in the spring 2012 French elections, it seemed clear the ties were political rather than personal, and there were suggestions this might be the beginning of a sustained period of transnational partisanship (Guérot 2012, Cramme 2012, Palmer 2012).

[6] See e.g. Koenig-Archibugi in Archibugi, Koenig-Archibugi and Marchetti 2011, pp.177-8: partisanship is not amongst the pathways to transnational democracy discussed, and cannot be assimilated to intergovernmentalism in general if, as I have suggested, the partisan tie goes beyond a mere pact of expedience. A rare volume on transnational partisanship in this literature is Sehm Patomäki and Ulvila 2007.

[7] This is in addition to whatever it might contribute to a transnational democracy once established.

[8] Empirically these two circles may not overlap: it may be the former (partisans-as-sympathisers) is wider than the latter (partisans-as-agents), or conversely, that the former (the 'true believers') are a narrower set than the latter (those 'going through the motions'). Our discussion focuses on where the circles overlap.

[9] In some ways the debates are dissimilar: no-one argues global democracy has existed, whereas later I shall give instances of what I take to be transnational partisanship. But because such instances are contestable, and the phenomenon not widely recognised, it seems useful to proceed in the same manner as thinkers of global democracy, examining fundamental questions of possibility rather than simply pointing to empirical instances.

[10] This point is important, even if one avoids, as I have done, a definition of partisanship in terms of office-seeking.

[11] On the 'schools of partisan thought' that preceded institutional change: Scarrow 2006, p.19.

[12] This pluralism includes not only the parallel presence of national and transnational institutions but diverse forms of both (e.g. within the latter category both intergovernmental and supranational institutions). That partisanship requires a certain concentration of decision-making power was the intuition of the American Federalists, who advocated the separation of powers and a strong judiciary partly as a means to obstruct such activities.

[13] There is much historical research to suggest the limits of this reading: see e.g. Braunthal 1960, chap. 21.

[14] The unmaking of popular attachments to Czechoslovak nationhood in this period can be linked directly to the efforts of the Czech ODS and Slovak HZDS parties to generate public support for the state's dissolution once it became clear neither would be able to impose its economic programme on Czechoslovakia as a whole (cf. Innes 2001, Wolchik 1995).

[15] It may be said that while partisanship is possible in the absence of one such condition, it is not possible in the absence of several. Equally these conditions may be linked to further ones, with the suggestion the former become necessary conditions in the presence of the latter. Basing arguments from necessity on the interaction of conditions has much to commend it as a theoretical move, but the potentially relevant combinations quickly become too numerous for empirical analysis. The challenge is sizeable enough when approached retrospectively, i.e. by looking at the historical record; it is complicated further when one seeks to anticipate what the relevant interactions are. One does not have to deny their existence to view the possibility of predicting them as negligible.

[16] This is one way to understand Europe's transnational party federations – those extraparliamentary counterparts to the European Parliament's party groups and to national-parliamentary parties.

[17] Indeed, the internationalist impulse may be strong where like-minded parties experience the common predicament of exclusion from power: on internationalism as the response of early-twentieth-century European socialists to the national dominance of conservative parties, see Hanley 2007, p.150.

[18] While these groups often style themselves as 'movements', they clearly fit the description of partisanship offered: groups seeking control of governing institutions so as to pursue an ongoing project designed to shape decision-making in line with shared commitments. In this sense they have acted *de facto* as a party (Morales' Movement for Socialism in Bolivia), incorporated existing parties (Correa's Alianza PAIS in Ecuador) or slowly transformed from a coalition of parties into a single party (Chávez's Fifth Republic Movement became the leading element of the new United Socialist Party in 2007) (Webber and Carr 2013, ch. 7-9; see also Hawkins 2010). This is not to deny their important differences with the more organisationally established parties of Brazil, Chile and Uruguay (cf. Panizza 2009, p.193).

[19] Venezuelan President Chávez called in 2009 for a 'Fifth International' (Ellner 2012).

[20] A further institutional development was the creation in 2011 of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC): potentially a major step in regional integration, it remains embryonic at the time of writing.

[21] I.e. the rise to power, in a distinctive ideological form, of the US Republicans, the British Conservatives and the German CDU.

[22] In Europe, composed notably of Britain's New Labour, the French Parti Socialiste, the Red-Greens in Germany, and a centre-left coalition in Italy (Ross 2011, p.334).

[23] In the first case; the market-building, labour-weakening measures of the Single European Act (1986); in the latter, the EU's Lisbon Agenda (2000), which in its original guise showed the influence of Third-Way thinking, though which was later recast, as the moment passed, with a liberal-economic focus on growth alone: cf. Ross 2011.

[24] Via a different argument to do with the structure of electoral competition, the same conclusion is reached in (Bardi et al. 2010, p.97).

[25] The legacy of the Christian-Democratic moment was the European People's Party (cf. Kaiser 2007, p.317); today's Party of European Socialists is the descendant of the Socialist Internationals (Lawson 2006, Hanley 2007). Arguably the Third Way's legacy was the thinktank-based 'Progressive Governance Network' (1999-). Such legacies tend to be more or less strong depending on how successful the parties involved continue to be at the national level.

[26] High-density networks by contrast are such because many of the possible ties between nodes are present, thus knitting together the whole more evenly: cf. Kadushin 2011, pp.29ff.

[27] Partly this may be explained by Christian Democracy's paternalist streak: partisanship guided by a participatory ethic might conceivably have differed.

[28] The limited success of the Third-Way coalition of the late 1990s can be ascribed to persistent programmatic differences between Third-Way parties (Ross 2011).

[29] This is not to suggest parties generally classified as 'far-right' are unable to mobilise transnationally – in contemporary Europe there have been several successful instances (cf. Mammone, Godin and Jenkins 2012). They generally succeed however only to the extent they can generalise their concerns, e.g. by evoking transnational threats such as Islam or European integration.

[30] Similar claims are possible for the libertarianism of the Pirate Party and its delocalised ideas of digital culture.

[31] Discussing 'avant-garde political agents' analogously: Ypi 2011, pp.161-2; on the concepts of 'Left' and 'Right' as ways to decouple political claims from localised groups: White 2012.

[32] For a blueprint of transnational democracy: Archibugi 2008. Only some partisans can be expected to hold such goals: it is in their appeal to the few, as well as in the logic of unintended consequences, that the normative interest lies.

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