

Minority Nationalism in a Time of Austerity

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Nationalism arises frequently in discussing the politics of austerity. The most common context is one of discussing the rise of the racist or xenophobic right, particularly in Europe. Here, the re-assertion of nationalist themes against the pressure of outsiders (such as international financial institutions or creditors) provides cover for pushing back multiculturalism, engaging in islamophobia, and more generally a shutting down of progressive cultural politics (Berezin 2013).

A less common approach makes the empirical observation that the politics of austerity is bound up with nation-state identities (Streeck 2013). The 2008 crisis and subsequent crises are read in national terms, with virtue and blame attributed to national characters. The differing popular understandings of responsibility and profligacy found, say, in Germany and Greece would provide an example. Canadian self-congratulation about the stability of their banking sector would provide another. The point is that an intra-national class politics of austerity is obscured: those with the resources to buy government debt can continue to benefit from long-term fiscal discipline aimed at paying those debts, even as the more redistributive aspects of state expenditure are reined in or cut.

In this chapter, we consider the case of minority nationalism, particularly the Scottish, Catalan, and Quebec cases, but look at the question differently: how does austerity affect the strategies and projects of nationalist movements? Are they forced to fit their national imaginary within the constrictive outlines of continuous budgetary rationalization? Do they face consequences with the movements aligned with them as a result? Can they find political openings in critiquing austerity, and if so, what are the possibilities of these openings? The study of minority nationalism opens a window on the political dimensions of austerity, including the space left for political imaginaries that push beyond the status quo to forms of social change or transformation.

Thinking about Nationalism

As opposed to starting from nationalism as a bad in itself, synonymous with closure to diversity, or it is a veil that hides deepening inequality, we instead begin with the continued importance of the nation-state in the organization of politics and political projects. Nationalism provides a shared horizon for a political community, and as an ideology, it provides a space of social conflict as to what the nation is and what its purposes might be. Rather than treating nationalism as something whose character is already known, we ask how it is reproduced in specific contexts given the pressures of austerity. Much like the horizon of social democracy is redefined as social democratic parties enter the field of austerity (as opposed to rejecting it), how does austerity redraw nationalist projects?

For this question, there is particular value in studying minority nationalisms, such as those found in Quebec, Scotland and Catalonia. These nationalisms cannot rely on mundane forms of national identification if they are to reach their goals. While members of majority nations may disagree about austerity, the framing of the question in terms of nation-state budgetary responsibility, coupled with the banal nationalism of everyday life, means that the future of their nation is not at stake. By extension, the changes austerity imposes on the national identity and the national imaginary are likely less immediate and visible.

Many minority nations, such as the Scottish, Catalan and Quebec cases considered here, are contesting the prevailing political arrangements. In Scotland and Catalonia, the period of austerity coincides with significant challenges to the existing constitutional order, while in Quebec, a nationalist party with the ultimate goal of reconfiguring the Canadian state holds power. As such, nationalist movements and politicians must continuously renew the mobilization of their citizens around national identities and national projects, even as the terrain changes.

The study of nationalism, quite understandably, is heavily invested in identity and culture. The construction of this **identity** nevertheless plays across existing social divisions. People must see themselves as sharing identities and common projects despite being differently located in unequal social relations. There are many different means of papering over those inequalities, including the role of compensatory policies in producing a sense of shared community. With heightened budgetary austerity, these policies are put under pressure, but with what impact on the projects of minority nations?

In rallying citizens around **national projects**, nationalist movements may try to expand their base by imagining a more inclusive sense of the nation (Salée 2002; Dufour and Traisnel 2007). Success in changing the constitutional status of a minority nation opens a founding moment for reworking existing relations of inequality. Some minority nations have used this possibility to promise a more egalitarian nation, albeit within the limits of what is deemed feasible in a given situation of inequality (Graefe 2005). In short, minority nations sometimes adopt national projects whose socio-economic content mimics social democracy. If social democracy finds itself bound within the politics of austerity, do we find a similar austerity of imagination in cases of minority nations?

Existing scholarship on the socio-economic strategies of minority nations underlines two sets of relationships. A first literature, more Weberian, emphasizes the role of social policy in national construction: it traces the contours of the sharing community, and creates solidarity and reciprocity in confronting risk. It therefore participates in processes of constructing and reproducing understandings of the political community, and as such becomes a site of conflict between majority and minority nations. This work has focused more on competitive state building behaviour where the emphasis is on the “building” (McEwen 2006; Béland and Lecours 2009). Nevertheless, periods of retrenchment are recognized as strategic openings for minority nationalisms to provide alternatives and to change citizens’ maps of solidarity. Minority nations thereby risk weakening their appeals through retrenchment but this risk is not absolute. It may be enough to be seen as less austere than the central state, or to blame the need for austerity on the profligacy of this state, or indeed to blame local austerity as the result of central state cuts.

There is also a more Marxist literature for studying the socio-economic positioning of minority nations. Without denying social policy’s identity-building character, it problematizes the singular emphasis on national competition, and the homogenization of nationalisms. Since social policy touches all sorts of social relations (such as class, gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality), making a “national community” through such policy is also about shaping those other relations and engaging the political actors that organize around them. National movements therefore cannot be “neutral” with respect to these relations, as any national project that they propose involves either their reproduction or their transformation (Salée 2002).

As minority nationalist movements pursue greater autonomy, they create a range of broader imaginaries: how might a more autonomous nation promote women’s equality or labour rights or business competitiveness? Nationalism is therefore not homogenous, and one role for nationalist movements is to construct a project whose imaginary is hegemonic. Successful

nationalist movements need to promise certain forms of transformation in order to rally actors to their projects (Salée 2002; Graefe 2005). In a period of austerity, do those imaginaries become austere in themselves, and with what effects on the social bases of nationalist movements?

This chapter does not erect a grand theory of minority nationalism and austerity. The differences between national situations and the overdetermined nature of nationalist strategy makes such an approach problematic. The chapter instead clears some analytical ground by considering specific cases in terms of the relationships prized by the two traditions presented above. We look specifically at the cases of Catalonia, Scotland and Quebec, because their respective nationalist parties have had to juggle ruling in a period of austerity with the promotion of their nationalist projects. We will consider each in turn.

Catalonia

Background

Contemporary nationalist politics in Catalonia have been driven by constitutional and fiscal issues. Most recently this has taken the form of the protracted saga over the 2006 Statute of Autonomy for Catalonia. A 2010 decision by the Spanish High Court to strike down and revise a number of the Statute's provisions on a potential referendum on Catalan independence infuriated the majority of the Catalan electorate, and on July 10th over a million demonstrators in Barcelona protested the Court's ruling under the slogan: "We are a nation. We decide" (Guibernau 2012a: 2-3).

Another long-standing issue is the fiscal arrangement between Catalonia and the central state. There is consensus within Catalonia that the region pays more in taxes than it receives in central state spending, which has led nationalists to call for increased fiscal autonomy (Petithomme & Garcia 2013: 6; Serrano 2013: 19; Henley 2012). In a context of severe governmental austerity the debate surrounding the fiscal dynamics between Madrid and Barcelona have intensified. The centre-right nationalist CiU party adopted an explicitly secessionist position in 2012 following failed negotiations with Madrid to increase Catalan fiscal autonomy through the creation of an independent treasury (Guibernau 2012b; Petithomme & Garcia 2013: 14-15).

Openings created by the financial crisis

This nationalist mobilization was reinforced by the response of the socialist PSOE government in Madrid to the financial crisis. Following the Greek sovereign debt crisis, the PSOE government was increasingly pressured by Brussels and elsewhere to impose significant austerity measures in April 2010. The following month it introduced an unprecedented program of cuts that saw public sector wages cut by 5%, a freeze on pensions, a raise in the retirement age, and a number of major public investment projects cancelled. Shortly thereafter the government introduced 'flexible' labour market reforms that constrained collective wage bargaining and made it easier for employers to perform lay-offs (López & Rodríguez 2011:24; Rico 2012: 219; Petithomme & Garcia 2013:13).

Following the central government's austerity measures, the center-right CiU returned to power in Catalonia for the first time in seven years. The party vowed to reign in public spending by 10% in 2011 and reduce the deficit to 1.3% of GDP by the end of 2012 from 3.86% of GDP in 2010. The aim is for all of the autonomous communities to have a balanced budget by 2014, a target agreed upon by the autonomous communities in conjunction with Madrid. The CiU started by reducing the size of the public service and in particular the number of high ranking officials; the latter by 23% in 2011. In 2012 the party announced that in order meet the 1.3% deficit to

GDP objective for 2012 they would introduce a variety of measures, including: reducing departmental budgets, raising service fees, increasing tuition by 7%, introduce a small €1 prescription drug fee, sell off a number of government assets, further freeze or reduce public service salaries, and slash the budget of the popular Catalan public broadcaster, the CCRTC, by 13%.

Despite these moves, the CiU has continually underlined the importance of the welfare state, which is almost exclusively funded and controlled by the autonomous communities themselves, and the party has emphasized its attempts to save it from cut-backs. In 2011, Catalan President Artur Mas told European Council President Van Rompuy that he could not go beyond the 10% spending reduction without “affecting the bases of the welfare state,” and in 2012 he stated that the aim of his austerity plan was to “protect the welfare state”. In a 2013 review of the CiU’s austerity program, the region’s finance minister reiterated the center-right party’s commitment to the ‘three pillars of the welfare state’ (social affairs, education, and health) and insisted that the government has done everything to cushion the impact of austerity in these areas; reducing Ministry budgets in these areas by 12.5%, whereas the other Ministries have been cut by 22%.

The CiU has thereby tried to implicate the central government for the toll of austerity. Although initially accepting the zero-deficit target by the end of 2014, they have since sought to renegotiate that objective after only having reached a 2% deficit to GDP ratio at the end of 2012. The Finance Minister warned that such a strict target would force him to design a “monstrous” budget for 2013 that would partially dismantle the Catalan welfare state.

With Spanish unemployment over 24% and youth joblessness skyrocketing to 50%, a series of strikes were held across the country protesting the ongoing austerity measures including general strikes in September 2010, March 2012, and November 2012--all of which had a significant presence in Barcelona. Million-man marches in favour of Catalan independence were also held in July of 2010 and September 2012. The former came on the heels of the High Court’s revision of the Statue of Autonomy and the latter took place on the Catalan national holiday, *Diada Nacional*. Although these protests were officially held in the name of Catalan independence, a number of commentators have noted their overtly economic overtones and connection to Spanish and Catalan austerity (Burgen 2012; Henley 2012).

One could argue that austerity has been a ‘tipping point’ for the Catalan nationalist movement on the ground, shifting it in favour of a secessionist rather than an autonomous position (Rico & Liñeira 2013). This assertion is corroborated by a recent empirical study, which suggests that support for Catalan independence is not strictly associated with national identity, and that economic and welfare considerations play an important role (Serrano 2013:18). This is part of the reason why following the global financial crisis, and in the midst of the Spanish austerity program, support for independence has more than doubled, jumping from 22% in 2008 to 57% by the end of 2012 (Guibernau 2012; Serrano 2013, Burgen 2012; Tremlett 2012). Moreover, as compared to Scotland, support for independence has not been significantly undermined by the European debt crisis. Support for Europe and the EU remains high among the population (*The Economist* September 22nd, 2013) and Catalan leaders have openly looked to Europe to assist them in their constitutional and fiscal disputes with Madrid (White and Larraz, January 3rd, 2014). Here we have an interesting example of how a period of austerity in fact expands the realm of political possibility to imagine broader constitutional possibilities.

Tensions within

While this expanded possibility can be tied to the CiU's positioning as the "good cop" in the austerity play, it has also raised tensions within the nationalist movement. Catalan voters registered their dissatisfaction with austerity in both the 2010 and 2012 regional elections. In November 2010 the CiU took power by displacing a three party left-wing coalition headed by the social democratic PSC, the Catalan arm of the then governing PSOE in Madrid. Although at that time the Statue of Autonomy saga was in full-swing, survey analysis points to an overwhelming concern among the electorate for rising levels of unemployment and the handling of the economy. Even though the PSC did not engage in significant austerity measures, the close connection between the party and the PSOE led the Catalan voters to punish the PSC for the PSOE's handling of the economy (Rico 2012: 234-235).

In 2012, Catalan voters voiced their dissatisfaction with the CiU's austerity measures by reducing their support for the nationalist party by a quarter, equalling a loss of 12 seats in the Catalan parliament (Petithomme & Garcia 2013). However, rather than revert to the PSC as they had traditionally done, a significant number Catalan voters turned to the left leaning nationalists in the ERC, doubling their share in the vote from 7% to 14%. Despite expressing concerns with the CiU's austerity (Govan 2012), the ERC eventually joined them in a pro-independence coalition government. Meanwhile, the PSC slipped further from their dismal 2010 result, with their vote share declining from 18% to 14% (Petithomme & Garcia 2013: 15).

According to Guibernau and others (Govan 2012), even though the CiU lost a number of seats following the vote, the election was more of an indictment government's austerity measures than their position on independence. This can be seen in the fact that of a total of 135 seats in the Catalan parliament, 71 were filled by pro-independence candidates (Guibernau 2012; Petithomme & Garcia 2013). In other words, austerity has opened opportunities for bolder minority nationalist strategies in Catalonia, but has also presages tensions as the critique of austerity unsettles the nationalist coalition.

Scotland

Background

As with Catalonia there are a number drivers of the nationalist debate in Scotland that pre-date the financial crisis and subsequent austerity. For one, the Scottish National Party's (SNP) recent push for a referendum on Scottish independence started prior to the collapse of the financial sector in 2007 when they were first elected to a minority government. Another important driver of Scottish nationalism, historically, has been the gradual disintegration of the British welfare state that were largely initiated by the neoliberal policies of the Thatcher/Major Conservative governments of the 1980s and early 1990s. The Thatcherite attack on trade unionism and redistributive policies alienated working class Scotland, who have consistently voted Labour since the 1950s (McCrone 2012: 71-72). Thatcherism had a major galvanizing effect on the home rule movement in the 1990s that eventually led to the establishment of a devolved Scottish parliament under New Labour in 1999 (Béland & Lecours 2008:11; Keating 2001).

Political Opportunities and tensions under austerity

The UK austerity program was initiated by the Conservative/Lib-Dem Coalition Government after they came to power in May 2010 with an initial reduction of £6.2 billion (2.6% of the total budget) to government spending upon taking office and a further £81 billion (10%) in cuts following the annual spending review in October of 2010. In June of 2013 the government announced its plan to extend their austerity program into 2015 with an additional £11.5 billion

reduction to come into effect that year. Key measures include a 19% average reduction in departmental budgets; a £44 billion or 22% reduction in welfare spending as part of the reform of the benefit system (i.e. the switch to ‘Universal Credit’); an increase in employee contributions to public pensions; a raise in the retirement age; a 7% annual cut for local councils (with an additional 10% cut in 2015), including a 60% reduction in social housing funds; and a drastic reduction in the number of publicly-funded non-government organizations. Scotland felt the impact of the coalition’s austerity plan to the tune of an 11% reduction in block transfer funds to Holyrood over 2010-2011 levels, equalling about a £1.3 billion cut to public spending.

The SNP government has not announced a systematic austerity program, but since 2010 they have initiated a number of cuts in public spending in an effort to ‘refocus’ public services (Scottish Government 2009:3). These have included a 3% cut to NHS budgets; a £25 million pound reduction to college budgets; a billion dollar cut to local councils, on top of a council tax freeze said to cost local governments over £3 billion; and a 41% cut to the housing budget. It is estimated that in total, the SNP is on track to reduce public spending in real terms by 18% by 2016/17, resulting in the loss of over 30,000 public sector jobs.

Assessing the full extent of SNP cuts to the Scottish welfare state is complicated for two reasons. First, the nature of the devolved settlement between Westminster and Holyrood does not grant Scotland jurisdiction over a number key social policy areas. In particular, social security, remains within UK jurisdiction; while health, education, and funding of local councils among other things have been devolved to Holyrood (Law and Mooney 2012: 66). Secondly, as the Scottish government has limited tax raising ability, they are very much dependent on the transfer of funds from Westminster for the day-to-day operation of government and social services. Thus, even in areas under Scottish jurisdiction the budgetary decisions made at Westminster play an important role in determining the level of funding available to the Scottish government.

The SNP has used these fiscal dynamics in defending their government’s record. For instance, in the SNP’s 2012/2013 draft budget, the Finance Minister argues that Scottish government’s ‘ambitious reform’ of public services has taken place “within the context of the most dramatic reduction in public spending ever imposed on Scotland by the UK Government,” and goes on to say that the SNP “have argued consistently that the UK Government is cutting spending too far and too fast, and that its actions run the risk of damaging the fragile recovery in both Scotland and the UK” (The Scottish Government 2011:iv). Speaking on welfare provision specifically, Deputy Leader Nicola Sturgeon has said that the SNP’s approach to social services has been “fundamentally undermined by the UK government’s deep and damaging cuts to benefits and services that will impact some of the most vulnerable people in Scotland” (*BBC News* December 22, 2011).

The SNP government has initiated a number of policies that would seem to affirm their commitment to the welfare state, including a ban on tuition fees, the introduction of free school meals, the abolition of prescription drug charges, and the preservation of universal long-term care for seniors (Gall 2011). The party has also tried to counteract policies detrimental to the welfare state stemming from Westminster, including investing £40 million to offset the Coalition’s abolition of the council tax benefit for low-income individuals and £7.9 million to assist people facing reduced housing benefit as a result of the so-called ‘bedroom tax’ which penalizes under-occupancy of council homes—both of these measures being part of the UK government’s wider program of welfare reform that was initiated in 2012.

That having been said, Scottish nationalists have been less successful than the Catalan in using blame shifting as a mobilization strategy. Independence rallies have been poorly attended,

and survey evidence suggests that the financial crisis and austerity has not significantly altered Scottish support independence, which remains static at about 30% (as has support for further devolution) (Keating 2011). That being said, in 2011 Scottish voters re-elected the explicitly pro-independence SNP by an unprecedented majority, which would suggest that a significant minority of voters cast a ballot for the SNP not because of their desire for an independent Scotland, but they believe that the nationalist party is best suited to stand up for Scotland's interests within the current UK framework (McCrone 2012:75). The relationship with Europe has likewise held less strategic value in light of the European sovereign debt. Whereas before nationalists talked about 'independence in Europe' and joining the North European 'arc of prosperity', now the ties to the EU and the rest of Europe have been significantly downplayed in the SNP's messaging (Scott and Mooney 2012).

Tensions Within

This lack of traction owes something to the centre-left orientation of contemporary Scottish nationalism, especially since the adverse experience of Thatcherism in the 1980s and early 1990s (Béland & Lecours 2008; Law 2012). The SNP's electoral base draws heavily from working class voters (Keating 2001; McMahon 2011). As a result of the composition of the nationalist movement in Scotland, cuts to the welfare state there are going to have a more detrimental impact on the social bases of support for minority nationalism than similar (if not more substantial) cuts would have in Catalonia, where a more broad-based class coalition holds between and within major nationalist parties (Miley 2013), and where disaffected voters can turn to another party or might be more supportive of austerity measures given the centre-right character of nationalism. Some observers have argued (Maxwell 2013; Gall 2011; Findlay 2011; Smellie 2013) that the SNP, despite their attempts to stand-up to the Coalition's austerity policies, have had trouble gaining momentum for independence because they have made too many cuts themselves and have alienated their support base within the working class.

Quebec

Background

Similar to the Scottish case, Quebec nationalism has taken on a social democratic flavour over the past half century, first as part of developing the accoutrements of the post-war welfare state, and then as part of an agenda to found a sovereign Quebec state that would be more egalitarian than the current province.

This latter project of social transformation was persuasive enough to give the sovereignist Parti Québécois (PQ) a hegemonic position over the broad left. This position was challenged in the late 1990s, when a PQ government implemented significant cuts to public sector employment in order to balance the budget, and was in various other ways seen as too ready to kowtow to neoliberal policy dictates. This created space for a new left-sovereignist party, Québec Solidaire, to contest the PQ, but also led to the weakening of social movement ties to the party. As such, even when the PQ was replaced in office by a more stidently neoliberal party, it was unable to fully rebuild its leadership over the broader left (Dufour 2009).

Openings and Tensions

Even before returning to power in September 2012, budgetary austerity had strained the PQ's relations with progressive social movements. Relations with the labour movement were cold following the PQ's decision (in opposition) to demand a faster return to balanced budgets following the 2008-10 financial crisis, even if this necessarily would mean significant cuts to state programs and services. Similarly, during the student strike in the spring of 2012, while the

PQ opposed fee increases and called on the government to negotiate, there were strong mutual suspicions between the party and the student leaders that prevented the party from being the natural and obvious political relay for the strikers. While sympathetic to the students, the party made sure to remain “above the fray”, ready to broker a freeze in tuition fees, but not to open the door to more radical changes such as reducing or abolishing fees, or changing the social vocation of the university (Pineault 2012).

Unlike in Scotland and Catalonia, the Quebec nationalist movement has not had great success in using austerity as a wedge against the central state. While the central government, particularly under the governing Conservatives, is regularly offside with majority opinion in Quebec (Graefe and Laforest 2009), the nationalist Bloc Québécois was decimated in the 2011 federal election, in favour of the tepidly social democratic New Democratic Party. The fact that the provincial state holds a high degree of fiscal autonomy, and that federal transfers to the provinces were not cut (although there has been unhappiness with changes in equalization and health funding), has meant that blame shifting for austerity has not had much success.

Once in power, the PQ has not broken with the austerity of the preceding Liberal budgets, maintaining the latter’s commitment to balance the budget in 2013/14. Given the over-optimistic assumptions of economic growth, maintaining this commitment has entailed capping programme spending growth at 1.8%. In practice, this has involved prioritizing health spending (4.8% growth) and child care spending (Ministry of the Family with 3% growth), holding the line on post-secondary education (2% growth) and education (1.8%), and cutting the other ministries by 2%. This has resulted in controversial benefit reductions for a small subset of social assistance recipients, as well as deficit shifting through cuts to school boards and municipalities. In addition, on the revenue side, the government only partially phased out controversial health taxes, while translating the promise of a tuition freeze into support for inflationary increases in fees. By contrast, promises to review the mining royalties schemes so as to increase revenues have been more-or-less disappeared in favour of measures to promote investment in the resource sector.

This list does ignore new measures pointing in the opposite direction, such as funding for 3000 more community affordable housing units, 28000 new childcare spaces, and the partial cancellation of the health tax. It also ignores that the Finance Minister has recently mused that balancing the budget is not the correct course of action if it chokes off economic growth. But the point is that the promise that the PQ might provide an alternative to a preceding policy of austerity has been eroded in practice. In the process, the tensions between the PQ and the broader left have been accentuated.

Tensions Within

Austerity politics in Quebec have therefore cemented the earlier schism in the nationalist movement between the main standard bearer, namely the PQ, and social movements who prefer to adhere to a nationalism that promises more thoroughgoing social transformation. In the face of an expected election in 2014, the union federations have been clear that they will not be supporting the PQ in light of its tepid record, although they are unlikely to support another party.

The PQ’s relative lack of interest in spurring a popular consultation on the national question, at least compared to the Scottish and Catalonian situation, likewise reduce its strategic interest to satisfy a broad left base by relaxing budgetary austerity. In the process, its own national imagination becomes more austere, making fewer arguments about the transformational potential of sovereignty, and indeed falling back on a more conservative definition of the nation. The proposed Quebec Charter of Values participates in this transformation of Quebec

nationalism from a 1990s vision of progressive competitive social democracy and inclusion to a 2013 vision of some mild redistribution and a narrower definition of the nation. The emphasis on building a narrower version of identity likely serves the PQ's narrow electoral interests over building a coalition that could change Quebec's constitutional status, but it also defuses left critiques as social movements such as the women's and labour movements, have to rebuild their unity over internal divisions about the PQ's Charter.

Conclusion

The diversity of minority nationalist contexts, as well as the overdetermined nature of outcomes, makes developing general theories of nationalism and austerity unlikely. Still, this indeterminacy does not undermine the purpose of trying to understand the reproduction of minority nationalist politics in a period of austerity. The cases in question suggest two important factors in shaping their trajectories. The first of these is the degree of fiscal decentralization. Despite much stronger austerity measures, the lower level of decentralization in Catalonia and Scotland provided greater opportunities for blame shifting, than in the case of Quebec, where provincial cuts were not seen as the result of central state measures.

The second is the severity of the assumed necessary austerity. While one might have assumed that the far-reaching austerity program in Catalonia would have done the most to unsettle relations within the nationalist coalition, and the more minor cuts in Quebec to have done the least, in practice it seems that the opposite result obtains. It may be that many citizens share dominant understandings of the need for austerity, but where that need is less clear (as in Quebec), the left is more prone to rebel.

For politics generally, then, there is every reason to expect that austerity shrinks the space for imagining alternative paths of development, even as it consumes the material base for papering over differences and thus ensuring political consensus. Yet, this does not mean adopting an entirely pessimistic outlook about possibilities for transformation. In the warp and woof of social conflicts, be they nationalist or other, there are spaces for developing and advancing values other than those of austerity, albeit slowly and unevenly.

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