

Negotiating Particularity in Neoliberalism Studies: Tracing Development Strategies Across Neoliberal Urban Governance Projects

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Abstract: A reading of critical perspectives on neoliberalism would suggest that it is dead but dominant, a revanchist zombie that appears paradoxically ubiquitous despite its inherent idiosyncrasy. We argue that neoliberalism's paradoxical death, dominance, and retrenchment can be interpreted by analyzing the dialectic of universalizing processes and particular forms within capitalism. Neoliberal projects draw political import from systemic, universalizing tendencies in capitalism, particularly those ideological processes by which contradictions and crises come to be discursively, institutionally, and politically conceptualized within the same paradigm from which they emerged. Building on well developed research frameworks in neoliberalism studies, we propose a set of analytical tools to interpret links between particular projects and homogenizing practices. We illustrate this with a case study of urban "megaevents" (eg Olympic Games or football World Cup), demonstrating how ideological commitments to event-based development strategies allow both the homogenizing imposition of entrepreneurial urban policy, and localized innovations in urban governance.

Keywords: critical neoliberalism studies, neoliberalization, entrepreneurial governance, megaevents

Introduction

Since the 2007 financial meltdown, the neoliberal project has been in crisis. Even some of its most ardent supporters have begun to rethink its legitimacy (Peck et al. 2009; Quiggin 2010; Sheppard and Leitner 2010). Yet neoliberalism remains hegemonic, underpinning a host of policy rhetoric and initiatives aimed at stemming recessionary declines (Crouch 2011; Demirovic 2009) and establishing "new", even more neoliberalized economic regimes (Boeckler and Berndt 2013; Murray and Overton 2011). Consequently, leftist commentators have adopted adjectives like "zombie" (Peck 2010; Quiggin 2010) or "dead" (Smith 2009) to describe the faltering but continuing neoliberal project.

Some have addressed this crisis of the "neoliberalism" analytic with a call for more expansive (Bakker 2010) or dynamic (Comaroff 2011) interpretations, often based around the concept of hybridity (Brenner, Peck and Theodore 2010b). Yet others bemoan the resulting overextension and related dilution of the concept (Clarke 2008; Harvey 2007). These conflicting accounts point towards some fundamental questions facing post-crisis neoliberalism studies: how can neoliberalism

be dead and in “post” or “after” forms but still dominant? How can it be fractured into multiple forms yet remain seemingly ubiquitous?

In this paper we focus on the latter of these questions by problematizing the current ubiquitous application of the neoliberal analytic. We argue there has been a gradual transition within the literature on neoliberalism, from “neoliberalism” being used as an analytical category to describe a relatively clear set of economic reforms that emerged in the late 1970s, towards a concept that is confusingly fragmented, used to reference almost all market-based governance projects (and many other contemporary governance phenomena). This shift in analytical form has led to problematic theoretical and political framings. Our core argument is that neoliberalism studies research increasingly tends to narrate particular economic and political projects into a paradoxically universalized project of neoliberal “-ization(s)” and “-ism(s)”.

Accounts which particularize neoliberalism with a sole focus on the question of difference risk assuming an underlying, ironically totalizing neoliberalism. The paper seeks to develop an approach for interpreting neoliberalism’s specificities without losing sight of the relationship between neoliberalism(s) and the capitalist relationships it supports. Our approach theorizes a dialectical relationship between neoliberalism (as particularity) and capitalism (as universal). We principally view capitalism as a revolutionizing project that relies on the production of solutions, explanations, and models that are universalizable; assembling diverse, dynamic arrays of particular places, materials, and people under capitalist regimes. Neoliberalism represents the contemporary process (institutional, political, economic, and discursive) by which this self-revolutionizing is achieved.

Critical engagement with the messy landscape of actually existing neoliberalism(s) has much to contribute to our understanding of how capitalism becomes universalized and hegemonic. Parsing this relationship is necessary for interpreting neoliberalism’s contradictory death and dominance, polymorphism and homogeneity, and dynamism and historical staying power. We therefore do not reject this project, but rather articulate a theoretical framework that explains why this messy landscape actually functions to reproduce capitalist relationships. In order to illustrate our framework, we briefly apply it to read neoliberal urban governance around sporting “megaevents” (eg Olympics or World Cups).

Neoliberalism Studies on Particularity and Universalism

As scholars have traced neoliberalism’s growth and development, two over-arching framings have become evident. The first reads neoliberalism as a particular version of capitalism, seeing neoliberalized economies has the latest form of an ever-mutating capitalism. The second framing focuses on neoliberalism as fractured into varieties, exceptions, and other forms of particularity. While not mutually exclusive, both framings are concerned with the particular form of political economy that neoliberal reforms impose on societies. That is to say, neoliberalism/neoliberalization becomes the primary object of analysis, as either the form of economy being identified and/or the brand of economy being taxonomized. This leads neoliberalism studies away from problematic notions of neoliberalism as monolithic, only to construct an

equally paralyzing conclusion that all neoliberalisms are always particular. While we certainly agree that nuanced analysis demands attention to particular contexts, the question of what connects various neoliberalisms is often overlooked.

Frameworks for conceptualizing neoliberalism have gradually evolved from accounts of political economic change to a focus on particular outcomes of market-based governance. Despite a nuance built into early writings on the concept (Bourdieu 1998; Foucault 2008; Harvey 1989; Peck and Tickell 1994), concerns emerged that “neoliberalism” was becoming reified and detached from material context. Thus in a frequently cited issue of *Antipode*, Brenner and Theodore (2002) call for attention to geographies of “actually existing neoliberalism” while Peck and Tickell (2002) argue that while “neoliberalism seems to be everywhere” (380) it should be studied through “local neoliberalisms” embedded in wider neoliberal networks and structures, and most importantly conceptualized as neoliberalization processes rather than an end state. Shortly thereafter, Larner (2003) asked whether “neoliberalism” had simply replaced “globalization” as the homogenizing signifier to explain what are presumed to be totalizing economic changes, and suggested renewed attention to subjectivity as a means of giving neoliberalism studies a deconstructive “identity crisis”.

Other widely cited critiques exploring particularity within and between neoliberalisms include Barnett’s (2005; Barnett et al. 2008) calls to question the incorporation of Foucauldian frameworks into the study of allegedly hegemonic projects like “neoliberalism” and Ong’s (2006) call to see neoliberalism as an attempt to introduce a “state of exception”, particularly in the Global South. Peck (2004) discusses neoliberalism as “fluid, multidimensional, and hybridized” (403) while England and Ward (2007) call for a relational understanding of neoliberalism that assesses its hybrid forms. Some have responded to such critique by arguing the need to think both particularly and universally (eg Brenner and Theodore 2002; Castree 2006; Peck 2004). However, valorization of particularity has become a dominant theme. According to Clarke’s provocative essay (2008:136–138), the neoliberalism analytic has paradoxically come to be promiscuous (over-extended analytically), omnipresent (everywhere, hence nowhere), and omnipotent (assumed to be dominant wherever it is found, regardless of qualitative differentials in “neoliberalness”). Brenner, Peck and Theodore (2010a:343) succinctly summarize the tension:

if progressive analysts and activists focus their efforts predominantly upon locally and regionally specific “alternative economies”, and bracket the broader systems of policy transfer and the geoinstitutional frameworks that impose the rules of game upon such contexts, they will also be seriously limiting their ability to imagine—and to realize—a world in which processes of capital accumulation do not determine the basic conditions of human existence.

Recent engagements with the notion of “variegation” have attempted to resolve the impasse by thinking about neoliberalism as an aggregation of particular projects or as a subspecies of a generalized capitalism. Reiterating his general thesis that neoliberalism represents a moment of creative destruction, Harvey (2007:42) argues there is something fundamental in capitalism that connects particular neoliberal forms:

an historical-geographical trajectory of capital accumulation that is based in increasing connectivity across space and time but marked by deepening uneven geographical developments. This unevenness must be understood as something actively produced and sustained by processes of capital accumulation, no matter how important the signs may be of residuals of past configurations set up in the cultural landscape and the social world.

Building on the “varieties of capitalism” school, Peck and Theodore (2007:760–761) call for a conceptual framework based on “variegated capitalism” which moves

beyond the routine pluralization of capitalism, and the alternating proliferation and pruning of a reified set of “models”, to probe the principles, sources and dimensions of capitalist variegation, understood as a more explicitly “relational” conception of variety. In other words, it means coming to terms with the causes and forms of capitalism’s dynamic polymorphism.

Variegated neoliberalism, then, implies:

a variegated form of regulatory restructuring: it produces geoinstitutional differentiation across places, territories and scales; but it does this systemically, as a pervasive, endemic feature of its basic operational logic . . . [such that] neoliberalization represents an unevenly developed, hybrid, patterned tendency of market-disciplinary regulatory restructuring (Brenner, Peck and Theodore 2010a:330).

Bakker (2010) extends the variegation concept further, defining variegation of neoliberal natures as dialectical, being between geoinstitutional differentiation and translocal patterns and processes (722). She mobilizes this to demonstrate the ways in which comparative moves beyond neoliberalism as ideal type can produce more nuanced genealogies of the interplay between neoliberalization and socio-natures. Robinson (2011:1098) makes a similar argument, suggesting that critical urban scholars should not just descriptively note the presence of hybrid neoliberalisms, but also consider the factors which systemically shape hybrid urban processes.

These attempts at conceptualizing variegation and connectivity thus represent an effort to define neoliberalism inductively, as emergent from hybrid forms and geographical-historical legacies. Indeed, many now conceptualize neoliberalism not in relation to capitalism but rather as emergent from particular neoliberal projects. As such, serious discussion of whether there is a broader logic running through those various projects becomes difficult. In short, we find that neoliberalism’s position in ideological terms has become poorly defined in much of the neoliberalism studies literature.

Brenner and Theodore (2002:353) caution against isolating neoliberalism from particular projects, arguing that such a focus brings attention to neoliberalization as a process rather than form:

we are dealing here less with a coherently bounded “ism” or “end-state” than with a process . . . of *neoliberalization* . . . the somewhat elusive phenomenon that needs definition must be construed as a historically specific, ongoing, and internally contradictory process of market-driven sociospatial transformation, rather than as a fully actualized policy regime, ideological form, or regulatory framework. From this perspective, an adequate understanding of contemporary neoliberalization processes requires not only a grasp of their politicoideological foundations but also, just as importantly, a systematic inquiry into their multifarious institutional forms, their developmental tendencies, their diverse sociopolitical effects, and their multiple contradictions.

This intervention into neoliberalism studies is productive, but in relegating ideology to a static form—as “ism”, not “ization”—it divorces “neoliberal ideology” from “actually existing neoliberalism”. The resulting focus on particular institutional and historical geographic manifestations of neoliberalism leaves the ideological process in neoliberalism under-examined.

In their edited volume on neoliberalization, England and Ward make a similar argument. They argue for a focus on the processes of enacting and producing neoliberalization: “neoliberalization as contextual and contingent rather than a universally inevitable monolithic force” (2007:250); as a relational field of complementary differences that do not necessarily correlate to qualitative hierarchies of neoliberal-ness (253). They see their attempt to probe the complexity and contingency of neoliberalization as parallel to Gibson-Graham’s (2006 [1996]) deconstruction of capitalism, juxtaposing their volume’s approach against the abovementioned vision of neoliberalism as “a universally inevitable monolithic force”. This intervention is important; however, this nuance-versus-monolith caricature valorizes particularized forms of neoliberalization at the expense of addressing the origins and broader impacts of neoliberalization. In largely avoiding the “why?” of the production of neoliberalization, such a separation risks privileging neoliberalism as the type of reified self-emergent system that Gibson-Graham set out to critique.

This tendency to read neoliberalism from particularity—and to ironically leave the monolith unaddressed—is something Barnett (2005) has lamented, arguing that for many “neoliberalism” is simply a hyper-Foucauldian discourse; that neoliberalism is yet another totalizing, hegemonic signification structure. Questioning the implications of commentaries on “post-neoliberalism”, Clarke (2010) argues we have reified neoliberalism despite our best efforts to problematize it. He asks whether “the discursive, political, policy and cultural dominance of market populism might have led both enthusiasts and critics to overstate its hold on the popular imaginary?” (380). Endlessly problematizing neoliberalism, however, leads to a certain level of analytical inefficacy. Whilst essentialist claims that “neoliberalism is everywhere” also imply that it is nowhere, seeing neoliberalism as an axiomatically malleable and vacuous hermeneutic—as “a necessary illusion for those on the geographical left: something we know does not exist as such, but the idea of whose existence allows our “local” research findings to connect to a much bigger and apparently important conversation” (Castree 2006:6)—also leads to dead ends.

Reading the Particular and Universal in Neoliberalism

Debates over neoliberalism therefore need to build on our advanced understandings of particularity by re-engaging with the question of universality. We must discuss what connects the multiplicity of neoliberal forms: what is it that is being variegated? How is coherence produced and regulated within such differences? To do so, we suggest a theoretical approach to neoliberalism studies which considers the dialectics between particular neoliberal projects and universalizing capitalist logics. Here we lay out the framework and its implications for analysis of neoliberalism. While this paper is intended primarily as a theoretical commentary, we illustrate our framework in the

final section of the paper with an empirical discussion of urban neoliberalization, entrepreneurial governance, and urban planning around sporting “megaevents”.

The concept of universality has been a central concern in contemporary critical theory, as scholars attempt to rethink the concept of universal within broadly post-structuralist philosophies (eg J. Butler, Laclau and Žižek 2000). Consequently many have returned to Hegel’s (2010 [1831]) conceptualization of the universal as emerging from the particular. For Hegel, we come to know what is universal through particular categories. But unlike the particular, the universal exhibits some form of internal logic defining itself. Marxists applied Hegel’s framework to explain how a totalizing project like “capitalism” can only be understood through a variety of particular categories. In fact many of Marx’s analytical concepts—like “labor”, “commodity”, or “fetish”—all presume a universalization from specificity. In an orthodox reading, capitalist innovations are those that systematize particular practices (eg labor practices) into generalized relations of production, reinforcing those relations in the process [see Althusser’s (2005 [1965]) essay “On the materialist dialectic”].

Hegel makes an important distinction within his conceptualization of the universal. On the one hand he identifies “abstract universality”, in which a concept is generalized but lacks ontological determinacy. On the other hand, he talks of “concrete universality”, which has ontological determinacy. In terms of “capitalism”, this distinction can be used to describe how capitalist political economy has a variety of forms and practices, but that it only becomes concretely universal when it contains a self-definitional quality that extends beyond each particularity. “Capitalism” is concrete if it has consistency beyond simply whatever each capitalist practice or form entails in a particular situation. The concrete universal therefore involves, in Hegelian terms, “identity-within-itself” (R. Butler 2005:58).

There are two important points to be drawn from this Hegelian distinction. First, the universal and the particular are dialectically reliant on each other for definition. That is to say, a universal exists in and through a world of particularity. Second, the universal is visible in precisely those moments when it encounters the particular (R. Butler 2005:61), at “the uncanny point at which the universal genus encounters itself within its own particular species” (Žižek 2008 [1991]:34). The universal therefore becomes knowable when it encounters the particular, and serves as the referent for articulating why the particular is different.

Slavoj Žižek (1999, 2004) has developed this Hegelian conceptualization of the particular and universal to provide a vocabulary for interpreting universality and particularity in the context of late modern capitalism and contemporary politics. In *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (J. Butler, Laclau and Žižek 2000), Žižek takes up the Hegelian notion of concrete universality to argue that the universality of capitalism is to be understood in a dialectical relation to its exception(s): the universal of capitalism is to be found in precisely those moments when exceptions to it become apparent, yet these exceptions are still ultimately symbolized within the universal’s frame of reference (239). He argues that the universal is seen when particular cases are symbolized with reference to it (as a particular variety of, or as an “exception to”, the universal) (241).

For Žižek, the universal is therefore not simply a “universal secondary identification” (J. Butler, Laclau and Žižek 2000:90), some additional label that particular members of a species take on; nor is it a hegemonized universal in which one particular meaning comes to dominate others and stands in as an Hegelian abstract universal. For Žižek the universal is instead a “constitutive exception” (see also Kisner 2007:10–17). That is, since universal salience emerges from the particulars, the universal depends on the exceptions and particularities that are defined relative to it. Definition as “variety of” or “exception to” the capitalist signifier reinforces the role of that signifier as a universal referent. The pertinent message is that “the Universal emerges within the Particular when some particular content starts to function as the stand-in for the absent Universal— that is to say, the universal is operative only through the split in the particular” (Žižek 1999:176). We enter the universal through discussions of the particular, but analysis of both relies on understanding their dialectic.

Ideology as Universalizing Practice

The relevant question for Žižek is therefore not whether we should be analyzing universal or particular, but rather how we perceive their co-constitutive dialectic (R. Butler 2005:62). He develops his analysis through a discussion of “parallax” (Žižek 2004), the notion that the same object seen from different perspectives is just that—a common object seen through a variety of viewpoints. How different viewers bracket their experiences to reflect their own subject positions is often as important as what they are seeing, and it makes the discussion of that commonality all the more necessary. Analyzing ideology is thus largely a task of interpreting this process of bracketing: interpreting the viewpoint from which the subject engages with social reality. Žižek reads ideology using Jacques Lacan’s (1988) psychoanalytical framework of Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary orders. Briefly, this triad encompasses the interwoven levels through which the subject comes into being. Paraphrasing from Žižek (2007:8–9), this triad is analogous to a game of chess: the rules of the game are Symbolic. These representational and material parameters bound the horizon of symbolic possibility. The Imaginary involves the ways in which the pieces are imagined (eg visualized, named, and shaped). Multiple imaginaries can fit a single symbolic—it is possible for the rules of the game to remain in effect even if a knight is called something other than “knight” and is not shaped like a horse. Finally, the entire complex of circumstances that impact the course and outcome of the game are real in Lacan’s sense of the term. They are the not entirely controllable yet fundamental events and variables that often determine what actually happens in the game, and which can only ever be partially symbolized since they are emergent.

Žižek locates ideology in the (capitalist) symbolic. It is that field in which the subject is symbolized; that which serves to represent “real” contradictions and exceptions within a universalizing horizon of capitalist possibility. This real-symbolic tension is resolved through the symbolizing work of ideology:

ideology re-signifies sightings of the “real” in order that they become compatible with capitalist symbolic paradigms (eg systemic flaws in financial markets are viewed not as the inevitable consequence of capitalist economic competition, but rather as the result of dysfunctional party politics or rogue managers). What this process generates and re-inscribes is an intellectual and psychological dependency on capitalist solutions for both capitalist and non-capitalist problems. The “ideological fantasy” (Žižek 1989:33) allows a cognitive separation between what capitalists do and how they justify their actions. It is this separation that allows an ideological engagement with the symbolic to emerge: it becomes possible for crisis-prone capitalist solutions to be taken seriously as solutions to crises caused by these same “solutions”.

This insight is key to understanding how neoliberalism operates principally as an ideological component of the capitalist symbolic: capitalist practices and relationships are universalized through neoliberal discursive, institutional, and policy work. At this point though, it is necessary to develop our understanding of the parallax relations between capitalism (as universal) and neoliberalisms (as particulars). We want to ask how do the multitudinous exceptions to, and variants of, neoliberalization facilitate a continuance of capitalism?

Neoliberalism and Capitalism: A Relation Founded in Ideology

We proceed from the position that neoliberalism is an ideological process for assembling particular political economic forms in a universalizing capitalist symbolic. The tendency toward generalization of neoliberal models derives its purchase from the universalizing tendencies in capitalist ideology. Thus while neoliberal projects are partial and particular, analysis of neoliberal variegation, multiplicity, and contingency can help unpack capitalist symbolic processes. Without a continual referral to the particular-universal dialectic within the capitalist symbolic, however, there is a risk of reifying neoliberal particularities into an abstract universal (one that is still contained within the paradigmatic field of capitalism) without addressing the processes by which neoliberal projects derive intellectual and political potency. Alternatively, analysis of how (capitalist) symbolic parameters bound the particularities of neoliberal projects to maintain political economic conditions provides a powerful position from which to critique capitalist practices and formulate a related politics.

Our starting point for understanding neoliberal projects is therefore to see neoliberalization as part of the ideological process by which capitalist logics are universalized through discursive, institutional, and policy innovation. Echoing other historically specific capitalist logics like Fordism, neoliberalism is not ideology per se, but a symptomatic expression of and symbolization in the capitalist symbolic. In Žižekian terms, neoliberalism can be read as building fantasy constructions which ideologically resymbolize “real” capitalist contradictions in ways that articulate those contradictions within the paradigmatic horizon of a capitalist symbolic: “a means for an ideology to take its own failure into account in advance” (Žižek 1989:126). The process of symbolization relies on a construction of fantasy to build

representational horizons within symbolic parameters. Returning to Žižek's (1989) "ideological fantasy", identifying with the fantasy symbolically accommodates contradictions, inconsistencies, and exceptions—recognizing an inconsistency and then addressing it in such a way that the inconsistency does not challenge the purchase of the symbolic that produces it.

Commentators on the performativity of economics (Callon 1998; MacKenzie, Muniesa and Siu 2007) and economic geographies (Barnes 2008; Berndt and Boeckler 2009; Gibson-Graham 2008) have spoken to a similar process, albeit not in Lacanian terms. Their general point is that the application of a particularized set of discursive and policy models (neoliberal models are commonly cited examples) come to define the discursive, institutional, and political terrain on which economic matters can be negotiated, as economies are materially performed and reproduced. Linking ideology to performativity, in Žižek's vocabulary "ideology" arises when "even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironic distance, we are still doing them" (1989:33): In this sense fantasies about how the economy should work are performatively enacted (done, even if not believed in). Our approach contributes to analyzing that process, by clarifying why the neoliberal performative emerges in the first place. That is, we see it as part of the process by which capitalist contradictions and antagonisms are contained within a capitalist symbolic.

Neoliberal projects have been very effective at resignifying the problems of post-Fordism, so that capitalism itself is rarely questioned as either a productive or just economic system within public debate. The performativity of fantasy is seen, for example, in recent debates over tax subsidies and fiscal austerity measures. Knowledge that tax rates and economic growth are tenuously correlated is widely available. The role of regressive tax-subsidy formulas in stimulating macroeconomic growth and employment (eg Laffer 2004) is theoretically tenuous and contested empirically (Quiggin 2010). However, these reforms are routinely implemented despite their contradiction with the interests of many of the same Euro-American voters who call for austerity in order to finance tax subsidies. Ideological "certainty" that austerity leads to growth politically overwhelms empirical uncertainty about that austerity-growth function. Similar arguments could be made about the contradictory popularity of many neoliberal programs.

Viewing particular forms of neoliberalism as functioning always in relation to universal capitalist logics therefore enables an ideologically contextualized analysis of particular governance projects. Calls to focus on capitalism within neoliberalism studies are not new. Harvey's (2005, 2007) understanding of neoliberalism as based on class conflict, creative destruction and accumulation by dispossession places neoliberalism as the newest stage of capitalism. Likewise, Brenner and Theodore (2002) tied neoliberalism to capitalism while discussing the former as a moment of creative destruction. Duménil and Lévy (2011) explicitly tied neoliberal restructuring to capitalist class relations. Our contribution supplements these efforts by interpreting relations between neoliberalism and capitalism, engaging directly with the ideological dimension: we read neoliberalization as a series of ideological innovations that symbolize and perform particular projects, places, people, and materials within a universalizing capitalist symbolic horizon.

Towards a Symbolic Critique of Neoliberalism

We therefore argue that critics of neoliberalism should engage the ideological interface between individual neoliberal projects and attempts to universalize capitalist logics. A contemporary ideological politics, according to Ernesto Laclau, can be found in contesting hegemonic forms of understanding. Ideology can be discussed in post-Marxist terms as a process of topological closure (Laclau 2006:114) in which hegemonic institutions close off the discursive terrain in which political action is possible. Through naming and delineating equivalences between social categories, those categories are constructed (and can be contested by claims-making on that naming) (Laclau 2005:224–226).

Politics in this sense is based on an expansion of the symbolic terrain in which existing boundaries—and the hegemonic institutions that set them—must be contested. Following commentators like Žižek (1999, 2005) and Rancière (2006), our argument is that such an expansion cannot be launched solely from analysis of particularity. An effective political analysis needs to format generalizable policy and political recommendations that build on the particularities of capitalist contradictions. Since neoliberalization is part of capitalist ideological processes, and analysis of neoliberalism requires focus on its contingency and multiplicity, contesting neoliberal projects is necessary but not sufficient. Instead, we argue for a critical politics that contests both particular projects and their work in universalizing exploitative capitalist logics.

We need to question why different neoliberalisms seem to be everywhere, not only why neoliberalism seems to be different everywhere it manifests. Nuanced analysis of particular neoliberal projects is necessary for critiquing them, but so too is an ability to articulate why they are problematic and how they are able to be generalized from one site to another. In parallel with calls to reassert the political in both particular and universalizing forms (Rancière 2006; Žižek 1999, 2005), there is a need to re-politicize the universal, to move towards a politics that confronts the capitalist Same in both its dynamic particularity and its homogenizing generality. In this way analysis of neoliberalization can be used for contesting the reproduction of the capitalist practices and relationships more broadly.

Megaevents Planning, Development Strategies, and Entrepreneurial Governance

A short, illustrative discussion of “megaevents” planning highlights the interplay between particular neoliberal projects and universalizing capitalist practices; in this case entrepreneurial urban planning and policy strategies for promoting the interests of urban growth coalitions, respectively. Megaevents are globally oriented events that entail major investment in the urban landscape: Olympic Games and FIFA World Cups are paradigmatic examples (Smith 2012:3). Megaevent planning exhibits variations on common “entrepreneurial” governance models (Harvey 1989), especially emerging inter-urban competition strategies that rely on commodifying culture in the city in order to extract rent from cultural monopolies (Harvey 2012). Our focus is on the ideological pathways that facilitate institutional and policy exchange across particular entrepreneurial planning projects: investment in megaevents is bound up in transnational networks of (quasi-)private stakeholders who routinely extract regulatory

concessions to facilitate real estate investment and protect the event “brand”. Likewise, individual megaevent planning coalitions significantly alter those transnational networks by using their specific planning contexts to develop generalizable planning models and policy templates for use in other megaevents.

A close reading of the megaevents planning process shows that many corporate actors move between universalizing policy networks and particularized planning mandates as one seamless strategy for securing return on real estate investment, protecting global and local brand presence, and opening opportunities for new forms of market-based intervention in the city. In short, while a variety of neoliberal projects play out through megaevent planning, an interpretation of that variety requires an attention to capitalist accumulation strategies across urban governance projects. Our objective is to outline how megaevents planning operates as an attempt to resolve core capitalist antagonisms across a variety of neoliberal governance projects. We describe different megaevents in different places, to interrogate what is assembling these projects in discourse, policy, and landscape change. This helps us answer why there are both similarities and differences across a variety of distinctive neoliberal projects. Space constraints do not allow us to fully build out a prescriptive framework, but rather we seek to illustrate the utility of our theoretical argument to the project of understanding and contesting neoliberalism. Likewise, the case study is not intended as a prototype or most representative case; it simply represents our research expertise and speaks to relevant literatures.

From Neoliberal Megaevents . . .

Sporting megaevents are major agents in urban change, and financial commitments to megaevent investment are increasing as a wider range of aspirant host cities and states compete to host events (Horne 2007; Preuss 2004). This increase in scale represents significantly more burdensome hosting commitments and, in policy terms, more scope for involvement by transnational private and nongovernmental stakeholders in the planning process. This change signals an increased commitment to entrepreneurial urban governance models as public and private stakeholders take on larger, potentially riskier investments in privately franchised events.

Megaevent organizers—like the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and International Federation of Association Football (FIFA)—are often discussed as key facilitators of neoliberal urban policy transfer. One recent events-management consultancy summarizes such critique, pointing to top-down transfer of entrepreneurial policy templates, and a “franchise model” of megaevent governance:

The “franchise-owners” [the IOC or FIFA] have strong governance and the “last word” over their events. Their main purpose is to guarantee the adequate quality of the event, also required by the broadcasting corporations and the main sponsors. Consequently, the host cities and countries have to submit themselves to a great number of conditions and obligations . . . which include a supportive financial environment including tax exemptions, certain legal immunities and the guarantee to ensure the intellectual property rights . . . The “franchising-models” of mega-events leave little room for the hosting countries and cities in the relevant decision-making processes. They therefore offer little flexibility to adapt themselves to the specific conditions and needs of developing countries (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung 2011:30).

Following the dialectic we outlined earlier, these institutions do impose something identifiably “neoliberal” on event host communities: events couple corporate-controlled place branding (Hall 2006) with an aggressive policing of franchise-holder and sponsor copyrights (Louw 2012). This is imbricated in capitalist accumulation strategies through the urban real estate market (investment) and the commodification of the urban (branding). Such franchising facilitates a universalization of entrepreneurial planning paradigms across a range of diverse urban contexts.

Reading megaevent neoliberalism from the other direction, however, highlights that these “franchise holder” neoliberal policy models reflexively evolve in response to the particulars of individual planning stakeholders: case in point, the above-quoted critique was funded by the German National Olympic Committee. Such particular-universal interconnectivity is often noted by analysts of neoliberalism. Recent work attempting comparative analyses across variegations (Bakker 2010; Brenner, Peck and Theodore 2010b) to trace neoliberal-capitalist complexity (Harvey 2007) has demonstrated the utility of conceptualizing neoliberalism as emergent across the idiosyncrasies of particular neoliberal projects. This is a core project of literatures on economic performativity and policy mobility: interpreting how neoliberal discursive formats are performatively generalized into policy hegemony (Berndt and Boeckler 2009; MacKenzie, Muniesa and Siu 2007), and how neoliberal policy projects are homogenized as hegemonic policy models are mobilized and emulated across contexts (McCann 2011).

... To Neoliberal Reform for Capitalist Events

Simply asserting that neoliberal megaevent governance is managed by transnational powerbrokers and reconditioned through particular governance projects falls short of interpreting motivations and power dynamics within these complex governance networks. We must also seek to understand the ideological dimensions of megaevent neoliberalism by focusing on the rationales that megaevent planning stakeholders use to articulate and justify event investment. The universalizing capitalist logic we emphasize throughout is an amorphaously defined growth strategy: common across many megaevent planning projects is a use of the event as a policy platform for “development strategies”, and an ideological project for linking those strategies to investment and policy change.

Capitalist reproduction through urban growth is never explicitly used as an explanation for megaevent bidding and hosting. Rather, megaevent planning responds to various types of local and extra-local concerns that shape the production of particular development strategies. In the following sections we track some of these rationales through technical publications, grey and academic literature, and media releases by megaevent planning stakeholders. To return to the theoretical language developed earlier, we identify megaevent planning imaginaries that have emerged within an existing symbolic, and facilitate new development regimes in the process. By operationalizing our “symbolic critique of neoliberalism”, we can interpret these shifting planning imaginaries and the practices of accumulation that motivate them.

Symbolic Fissure. Megaevents are marketed with reference to the potential for the event to yield developmental benefits: they are purported to produce economic growth through the production of momentary spectacles and related urban infrastructure. This reflects long-term political economic trends towards national states pursuing development objectives through the urban (Brenner 2004), and recent development policy debates that posit the city as an engine of national growth (World Bank 2009). Megaevent-led development can be read as an attempt to alleviate broader economic antagonisms which have evolved historically in response to crises in urban political economies: “fissures” in the symbolic.

The genealogy of megaevent-led development programming closely follows neoliberalism studies narratives describing post-Fordist urban governance. While for much of the twentieth century megaevent planning and funding was bound up in nationally driven urban modernization programs (Roche 2000), in the 1970s their purported “developmental” function shifted towards attempts to facilitate inter-urban competition and the gentrification of post-industrial neighborhoods (Smith 2012:42). This was coupled with a concomitant emphasis on the privatization of megaevent planning. The 1984 Los Angeles Olympics are often discussed as a breakwater moment (Andranovich and Burbank 2011): this mostly privatized Olympics was within budget and ultimately profitable, in contrast with the publically subsidized financial disaster of the Montreal 1976 Olympics (Shoval 2002). Since the late 1990s, policy emphasis has shifted towards “legacy”-based approaches (Smith 2012:42): megaevents are marketed as opportunities not just for “event-led development” but for “event-themed” urban regeneration in multiple sectors (Smith and Fox 2007). This itself represents an attempt to legitimize megaevents in light of their developmental failures and, consequently, their utility to capitalist development.

Contemporary megaevents are therefore often discussed as paradigmatic examples of neoliberal urban governance: megaevent bidding, planning, and investment is bound up in a politics of urban boosterism (Andranovich, Burbank and Heying 2001), place branding (Gold and Gold 2008), and growth machine competition (Surborg, van Wynsberghe and Wyly 2008). Echoing the “softer” side of neoliberalism, megaevents are increasingly marketed through entrepreneurial appeals to sustainability (Mol 2010), social inclusion (Edelson 2011), or pro-poor development (Pillay and Bass 2008). Simultaneously, critical scholars debate the inherently risky nature of speculative event investment, and the politically charged nature of economic impact assessment modeling (Porter and Chin 2012). Others point to the fact that megaevents entail large-scale gentrification and social displacement (COHRE 2007), militarization of the host city (Guilanotti and Klauser 2011), and famously opaque transnational governance authorities (like FIFA) (Eick 2010).

While we might well then trace out the various forms of megaevents and describe how they have evolved over time, our theoretical framework requires us to interpret the relationship of these particularities to the universalizing capitalist symbolic that they inhabit and recreate. Identifying contemporary megaevents as projects that emerged out of the necessity to deal with post-Fordist crises in the global North is

not novel (Roche 2000; Shoval 2002), but it is necessary to connect this observation to the discussion of particularities across various megaevents. Furthermore it provides us with a framework for explaining why so many cities pursue large-scale, high investment megaevents in the absence of any guaranteed returns: the demands and choices of capitalist development strategies enroll cities in entrepreneurial growth projects and must, in turn, act to justify their development policies and investments to their populace. Here, then, we can develop our framework to understand how quite specific and localized megaevent planning—what below we identify as bracketing—is a response to the tensions brought on by universalizable capitalist mandates for growth in urban economies.

Bracketing. The ways in which megaevents' developmental benefits are imagined and marketed can be read as a form of ideological bracketing. Megaevent planning rationales signal to neoliberal governance strategies selectively, bracketing definitions of "event-led development" from various planning stakeholders. Core economic antagonisms remain, however, in the gaps between ideological brackets. Interpreting those antagonisms allows us to read between apparently disparate neoliberal megaevent planning projects.

A "parallax gap" (Žižek 2004) in megaevent planning rationales during the most recent World Cup illustrates this dynamic. The South Africa 2010 World Cup exhibits competing definitions of "event-led development". Cup plans attempted to link two claims on transnational "African" development governance: transnational market-building and international pro-poor policymaking. The first bracketed view of "event-led development" posited the Cup as an opportunity for the South African business community to leverage a post-apartheid South African "brand" for expanding into southern African markets (Miller 2004). The Cup preparations—like previous unsuccessful South African Olympics and World Cup bids—were strongly tied to claims on this post-apartheid legitimacy, to be materialized through urban planning (Hiller 2000). One national state media release on World Cup legacy focused on the need for local investment in formerly segregated areas to materialize post-apartheid state commitments (Republic of South Africa 2010). FIFA engaged this project on a global stage, referring to South Africa as a post-apartheid "rainbow nation" (7 December 2010).

The second bracketed reading of "event-led development" posited event planning as an opportunity for pro-poor development interventions (Pillay, Tomlinson and Bass 2009). In this way, the Cup was posited as a means for South African state institutions to assume leadership in regional development policymaking. The same national media release (Republic of South Africa 2010) positions the Cup as a nexus between FIFA's global sport development initiatives and regionally based African development empowerment, echoing a tradition of African states linking megaevent bids to claims on post-colonial African identity and political leadership (Cornelissen 2004). Within policy documents and public media, these urban-based investment goals were also linked to national economic initiatives, notably the goal of halving national unemployment by 2014 (Pillay, Tomlinson and Bass 2009).

National brand management was successful for the business community: post-Cup surveys indicated an improved “national brand value” of South African tourism destinations (Grant Thornton 29 October 2010). Core economic antagonisms remained, however, as the event fell short of delivering the second group of “development” objectives promised by World Cup planning stakeholders. References to the development potential of global events and use of pro-poor rhetoric may have overstated the poverty reduction potential of events (Pillay and Bass 2008), as megaevents economic impact assessments often overinflate investment multipliers in their predictive models (Porter and Chin 2012). This was the case with the Cup: Grant Thornton, a consultancy employed to provide data on the event, had to revise down its economic impact projections multiple times (Grant Thornton 5 October 2010, 9 July 2011). An independent legacy assessment report is even less generous, arguing that while the Cup involved a policy shift towards pro-poor investment, long-term tangible development legacies are unclear (HSRC 2011a). Post-event opinion surveys reveal a South African public significantly disappointed with the lack of development performance (HSRC 2011b).

Parallax Reconnection. The South African case is an apt example of how various megaevents will inevitably take very particular forms. For planners in South Africa, dealing with the legacies of apartheid meant their World Cup planning was, in many ways, unlike that which could take place in any other country. We might therefore simply describe the case as a very specific manifestation of neoliberal planning. However, our symbolic critique of neoliberalism allows us to locate this particularity in relation to universalizing capitalist logics. In terms of megaevents, we might then interpret how a particular part of the event-led development process takes shape across different examples. In each case the goal of the development process is fundamentally the same (ie to enable corporate-managed growth), but this sameness is only evident *within* the particular forms of event planning and development taking place across different cities.

Tracing this dialectic in the case of megaevent planning shows that development mandates have increasingly taken two forms: the requirements of capitalist development strategies described above, and requirements that have developed in response to the prior. As megaevents have become associated with the negative aspects of speculative, event-led capitalist development (eg public sector losses, fiscal strain, unaccountability), those transnational agents responsible for facilitating major events have responded to resolve and/or temper such antagonisms. This has resulted in the production of a host of top-down “development” initiatives that are transferred between host communities by FIFA or the IOC. These usually require bidding cities to apply generic standards and practices to their planning agendas. However, these standardized requirements are applied by cities in particular ways which, in turn, produce the opportunity for cities to develop marketable policy goods. Therefore where we find development prescriptives applied across various mega-events, we often do not find a replication of initiatives and policies. To some degree this relates to the bracketing that we outline above, where each project responds to its locale. However, this particularizing of over-arching development

goals is also a consequence of the universal capitalist logics running across various events, in the sense that cities respond to the presented opportunity to produce marketable “policy goods” that can be sold and used for boosterish purposes.

This can be illustrated by examining the IOC sustainability requirements at its events and how cities have responded to these requirements. The IOC has gradually introduced environmental metrics and evaluations into its hosting criteria, and sustainability has emerged as a core legacy objective for the IOC (IOC and UNEP 2012). Organizers in individual host cities have played a major role in building this universalizing objective from their particularities. For instance, creating sustainable design models for use beyond London has been a central objective for the London 2012 organizers (IOC 28 July 2012). Adapting local sustainability standards, the London Organizing Committee was instrumental in developing *ISO 20121*, the “first global standard for sustainable event management” (David Stubbs, head of sustainability for the London Organizing Committee, interview in Witkin 20 July 2012). In the case of London, general IOC requirements were therefore applied in the local context and then subsequently abstracted to a set of policy mechanisms claiming universal applicability. Such a process mirrors that occurring in other cities where policy programs related to mega-events are explicitly developed to be “sold” to other cities.

This process of moving between the universal requirements of megaevent organizers and local conditions is one facilitated by corporate actors who move between universalizing policy networks and particularized planning mandates. In planning Vancouver 2010, IOC sustainability initiatives facilitated hybrid forms of “benevolent neoliberalisms” in which local growth machine stakeholders argued that event sustainability represents a public benefit from private development (van Wynsberghe, Surborg and Wyly 2012:15). In Qatar, the future host of the 2022 World Cup, two major real estate financiers—Qatari Diar and the Barwa Group—have partnered with sustainability certifiers to write their own green building ratings system (GSAS/QSAS 2012). This expertise couples well with London 2012’s contributions to global sustainability policy through *ISO 20121*: Qatari Diar is now redeveloping the London 2012 Olympic Village (Qatari Diar 5 December 2011).

Our goal in this illustrative case study has been to reconnect the particularities of megaevent planning. This reconnection is not only performed in terms of seeing these events as neoliberal manifestations of universal capitalist logics. It also requires empirical attention to specific practices that universalize neoliberal planning strategies via megaevents, as ideological claims about “development” build institutional and policy connections across individual planning projects. In tracing out how neoliberal projects institutionalize and generalize capitalist accumulation strategies, we can also identify how cities respond to this universalization through the particularization of these standards. They do so, we suggest, in order that they respond to the competitive opportunities of urban entrepreneurialism.

Conclusion

Neoliberal governance models draw much of their political dominance from systemic capitalist practices and relationships. Prominent among these are those ideological processes by which contradictions and crises within capitalist

accumulation come to be discursively, institutionally, and politically conceptualized within the same symbolic terrain from which they emerged. The main implication of this argument is that neoliberalism studies need to build on its well developed frameworks for conceptualizing the particularities of neoliberalism.

To further this project we propose a three-stage theoretical framework for tracing out the relationship between the particularities of neoliberalism relative to universal capitalist relations. First we identify, as others before us (Duménil and Lévy 2011; Harvey 2005; Peck 2008), how neoliberalism functions to resolve a crisis of capitalism. Unlike many others, however, we follow Žižek (1989, 2004) in identifying this resolution as being ideological: reforms are shaped largely by an attachment to capitalist ideology, not only pragmatic economic decisionmaking. Second we identify the particularity of neoliberalisms as a form of bracketing. This bracketing results from a requirement to resolve antagonisms from particular perspectives. Capitalism is neither uniform nor consistent, and consequently, responding to crisis within it will necessitate a diverse range of initiatives. Finally our framework demands a reconnection between these parallax perspectives. Here we propose not only a theoretical understanding of how different neoliberal reforms serve a common purpose, but also highlight the need to study agents of universalization through the local work of bracketing. Using the example of megaevents, we have attempted to demonstrate the utility of this framework for understanding the particularities of neoliberalism while at the same time remaining committed to a critical examination of capitalism.

We might then finish with an attempt to answer one of the questions we started with: how did a mongrel, mutating assortment of disconnected governance experiments come to resemble a consistent (though not necessarily coherent) project which attained hegemony over much of the contemporary global economy? The answer is not to be found in analysis of neoliberalism in isolation, but in explicating the ways in which arrays of particular places, materials, and people are assembled within the paradigmatic horizon of a capitalist symbolic. Neoliberalism is the currently hegemonic component of ideological processes that make this assemblage possible, and any contestation of neoliberalism necessarily entails a political engagement with fundamental antagonisms within capitalism.

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