Introduction: Goals and Values that are Inescapably Public

The decisive turning point

In the aftermath of the Allied victory in the Second World War, values and goals that were inescapably public captured people's attentive imaginations. "Things public" was a highly evocative, catch-all phrase that covered everything from new citizenship rights to state regulation of the modern capitalist economy. To speak of the public had an authentic, highly optimistic ring of pluralism to it and seemed the perfect choice of words for a democratic age. No one who had experienced the cataclysmic war had any doubt that a greatly expanded public domain embodied hope for a better life. It evoked the collective power of entitlement and the longing for a fair and just international order. Collective action became a core responsibility of the public, just as the ideal of citizenship would constitute the postwar framework for many postcolonial countries. As for the heart of economic policy, the seamless functioning of markets seemed to be banished forever from the modern repertoire of public policy.

In a more cynical time when Western liberal democracies regrouped to manage the perceived danger of Soviet communism, right-of-center governments enthusiastically embraced these same virtuous sounding policies that promised stability because it made for good politics that won elections, kept the Left out of power, and also protected governments from the harshest criticisms of their own citizens. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, a new era of international politics began. It consecrated an improbable marriage between the economic triumphalism of technocratic elites and the

political optimism of easily led global publics that expected their governments would continue to build strong cohesive societies and foster the public interest through generous government spending. This book is about their violent and chaotic divorce.

At first during the Cold War period, elites everywhere were convinced that they had tamed the shrew of public dissent. Capitalism was to be the basis for all social life, and market fundamentalism was to be the religion that gave us domestic bliss at home and peaceful prosperity abroad. In his bestseller *The End of History*, Francis Fukuyama saw no reason to alter this convenient arrangement. Millions agreed with him that this was the most pessimistic of ages, a period in which the public saw few possibilities beyond the paternalism of global capitalism.[1]

Today, coordinated and defiant activists are standing up to market fundamentalism and testing the conservative belief in a narrowly defined technocratic process of politics. These diverse publics in Australia, Brazil, and South Africa have challenged the command and control structures of undemocratic state authority and the new property rights created by global neo-liberalism's agenda of privatization, deregulation, and global free trade.[2] How could the high priests of supply-side economics, who preached the power of low taxes, freewheeling entrepreneurs, and liquid capital for global growth, have missed the other side of globalization – the rise of social movements, micro-activists, and networks of oppositional publics? How could Fukuyama, like many elites before him, have failed to learn Hegel's biggest history lesson?

Hegel, like the classical scholars he studied, understood well that history is a process of evolution and change. Social change is a foundational element of human society and the best efforts of the political class to maintain social structures that facilitate hierarchy and protect political privilege are ultimately self-defeating. What should we make of these angry, defiant, self-organizing publics as they reshape the sphere of interactive communication and affect the landscape of electoral politics? How should we think about this new geography of power with its disorderly voices, opposing interests, and virulent claims?

These are only a few of the pressing questions we must consider. Whether or not neo-conservatives are prepared to face it, their

defining moment is over. Global politics and US hegemony have dramatically changed over the two presidential terms of George W. Bush. Signs of imperial overstretch are visible everywhere, and US expenditure on armed forces has placed new stresses on the American economy. The Bush revolution's attempt at engineering regime change has organized new forms of resistance that challenge American bullying in managing the global economy.

In the 1990s, it was fashionable to define global neo-liberal reforms with such phrases as "macro-economic stabilization," "structural reform," and "deficit cutting." The respective crises in Mexico, Russia, Brazil, and Asia owe a lot to the rigid template thinking associated with the Washington Consensus. The new discourse is no longer framed by accommodating the market but by taming it. "Governance," "transparency," "institutions," "democratic policy," and "accountability" reflect the deep shift away from American leadership. Moises Naim got it right when he wrote that: "concerns about states that were too strong has now given way to concerns about states that are too weak."[3] The single-minded obsession with crushing inflation has been substituted by a much more immediate need to regulate chaotic financial markets following the collapse of the US subprime housing market A new global order is taking shape, and there is very little Clinton, Obama, or McCain can do to restore American hegemony to its former glory.

Polarized global publics and electoral volatility

Global elites and many publics still have not come to terms with the new politics of the age and the growing role of parliaments, courts, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the engaged angry citizen qua voter. What has changed is that the structure and system of global economic neo-liberalism are under siege from both the progressive left and the populist right. In 2007, a majority of angry French voters cast their ballots for Nicolas Sarkozy rather than Ségolène Royal; the Right garnered a larger share of the protest vote than the Left. In neighboring Belgium, the center-left Christian Democrats bloodied the nose of the Flemish socialist coalition. The ideological splintering of liberal values and economic principles has introduced new uncertainties for ruling parties

everywhere. Elites are divided about how much to spend on public services and how much the social market needs to be strengthened. For more than a decade, voter loyalty has become flux increasingly unpredictable as disgruntled publics shift votes to fit their volatile mood swings.

Presently angry voters have opted for Bolivarian alternatives in Chile, Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela. They not only want a change of government but more fundamentally a different model of development. In Spain, Sweden, Norway, New Zealand, and even Canada, voters are looking for alternatives to market democracy that so far have eluded them. They want governmental reform and a major policy overhaul. After more than a decade of unprecedented wealth creation, the issue of building more equitable societies is now on the agenda. In Germany, almost two-thirds of voters voted against Angela Merckel and the Right. In 2007 Australian voters finally turned with a fury against John Howard, the last Bush proconsul, to defeat his coalition government. They voted Labour into office with a massive majority more than doubling their seats in parliament. Even George W. Bush and Tony Blair, who once enjoyed popular support levels that verged on a cult of personality, have plummeted in public esteem following their tragic invasion of Iraq. In March 2003, public opinion formed a general consensus that Bush and Blair should be allowed to implement their vision of collective security. By December 2004, cautious support had turned to strong public opprobrium, and indeed a tidal wave of disgust was triggered by the images of Abu Ghraib prison (see figure 1). No one could have predicted this global electoral realignment that would polarize public opinion and shake up the electoral map.

The new IT model of social relations

Foucault's star has never shone more brightly in academic circles and he is the undisputed authority to discuss state governance practices, where panoptic authority disciplines citizens, punishes dissent, and ratchets up the grip of elites on the levers of power.[4] As valuable as Foucault's ideas are for a penetrating analysis of the exercise of power in modern societies, this frame tells us surprisingly little about the current changes underway in the
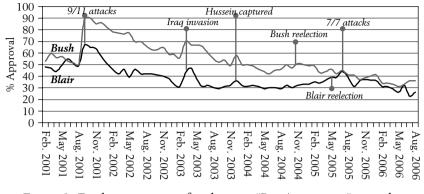
Figure 1 Declining support for the new "Pax Americana": popular
approval ratings for Bush and Blair

Sources: Robarts Centre, 2007, adapted from NYT/CBS polls; Ben Schott, "Five
Years of Consequence," *New York Times*, September 7, 2006

public domain. Anger over the heavy-handed tactics of elites has
reached new levels, and publics are giving vent to their frustration.
The "decline in deference," to employ Neil Nevitte's astute phrase,
is challenging the core institutions of liberal society.[5] In the family,
father no longer knows best; in politics, presidents and prime min-
isters are magnets of distrust, in organized religion a majority of the
faithful no longer practice rite or ritual.

Suddenly it would appear that people have acquired a new
vantage point. Social movement activists today are in possession of
the organizational and informational tools required to rescue the
idea of the public from the instrumental economic rationality of
the market and return it to its original roots in individual action,
collective achievement, and public reason. The signing of the Land
Mine Treaty in 1999 against the use, stockpiling, and production of
land mines is perhaps the most iconic example of a success story
of transnational protest helped by a small army of diplomats. The
creation of the International Court of Justice in 2002 to prosecute
any government or national citizen from a signatory state for
crimes against humanity is another milestone that could not have
happened without the support of millions of activists worldwide.
Their cumulative impact has registered at the United Nations in

the dozens of conventions, treaties, and international agreements (see appendix).

One important boost for the NGO community is that government officials can no longer claim sovereign impunity for gross violations of human rights ever since an American judge accepted in the 1980s universal jurisdiction lawsuits against public officials who were alleged to have committed torture – war crimes against humanity – outside the United States. The near extradition of Pinochet rattled American governments as they realized that international law and foreign courts could have such legal muscle. The idea that the power of a national court can hold citizens from another country accountable for crimes against humanity and other extreme human rights abuses has given new legitimacy to the influence and role of non-state actors.[6]

We need to find an objective way of assessing the effectiveness and impact of all this micro global activism so varied and geographically disparate for imagining the future. There are tens of millions of micro-activists organizing their neighborhoods, protesting the abuse of power in their city, demanding clean water, better teachers, and a modern school system. Political scientists have not paid a lot of attention to these atom-like civic actors who operate under the radar screen and are not part of any formal social movement. No news network covers what they are demanding or reports on their successes or failures. They are cursed with anonymity but are important nonetheless. They connect people and frame issues like the environment, AIDS, and poverty when no one else cares. Some experts are dismissive of this innovative churning substratum of free-floating global activism that lacks organizational structure and a full blown ideological identity, but this too is a mistake.

Micro-activism and the dynamics of power

Inglehart's empirical research for the last decade has found that activities that challenge hierarchy and elitism are on the upswing in virtually all postindustrial societies ever since thousands of anti-globalization protesters stopped the World Trade Organization (WTO) Seattle Ministerial dead in its tracks in 1999. People are

not "bowling alone" as Putnam insisted in his classic article by the same name. Publics have become highly critical of institutionalized authority in general "and are less likely to become members of bureaucratized organizations." [7] While traditional clubs and organizations, from mass political parties to the Elks and the Masons, have experienced falling memberships, more people are active in public than ever before, signing petitions, holding boycotts, and joining online communities. Inglehart discovered no widespread pattern of citizen disengagement in the Americas, Europe, or Asia. People are shifting their loyalties, not switching off. They are getting their heads into the game.

The second signal condition is that publics are increasingly better informed and better educated about the world around them. Many decades ago the great American scholars Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton wrote about the social impact of the mass media, at that time print, radio, and television. They were deep pessimists about its "narcotizing dysfunctionality" and the information overload that the free flow of information has had on the world of the citizen.[8] Two generations later citizen democracies no longer conform to this stereotype, if indeed they ever did.

Today massive social change in the structure of power is intimately related to the remarkable evolution of the structure of communication. In previous times the technology of communication was highly centralized along with the mechanism of governance and public authority. We live in a very different world that is defined by the globalization dynamic in which the technology of communication and structures of public authority are highly decentralized, networked, and driven by a model of social relations rooted in a complex culture of consumption. When this occurs, society becomes destabilized by the intense diffusion of new information technology, new ideas and the anti-democratic top-down command-control model of social organization. Like the rapid and massive introduction of the radio in the early twentieth century and the telegraph decades earlier, new forms of communication and political activism require us to rethink the dynamics of power and the way that digital technology reallocates power and authority downwards from the elite few towards the many.[9]

This is a radical idea perhaps, but one that has always been firmly grasped by those who understand the power of words, ideas, visual images, and texts. Sixty years ago, Harold Innis described the "bias of communication," a phenomenon by which technology transfers a great deal of social power to those with the ability to use it.[10] The strategies of new social movements seem to validate this Innisian hypothesis. The central idea that this book sets out to explore is that new communication technologies of text-messaging, blogging, and going on line, when coupled with grassroots organizing strategies, offer citizens a unique set of opportunities to engage in public participation and advocate bold strategies for social change. The public is no longer constituted of individuals meeting face to face; more than ever it is a complex network of many engaged individuals who come together around large and small issues that consume their time and interest in spite of geographic distance. Why is all of this happening?

The individual in public: reasoning together

At the heart of every dissent movement is a struggle with elite authority over how societies allocate public and private goods. Establishing the boundary line for rights and responsibilities between private interest and public purpose has always been intensely important, but is particularly so at a time when states, markets, and publics are negotiating the rules of economic integration and political interdependence. Societies need rules, and when political power is no longer contained within the nation-state, finding new ways to address transnational issues, from poverty eradication to climate change, becomes a primary focus point for publics. If there are to be clear sites of national authority and a stable international community, the public domain, in which consensus, cooperation, and public discourse figure predominately, has a compelling role to play as one of the coordinates that will "rebundle" identity and territory, in John Ruggie's evocative words.[11]

Terms such as "the public domain" and "public reason" constitute the new vocabulary of global dissent.[12] But it is this exercise of reason in public for defined social ends that has been pushed to the

front of the agenda by new information technologies. These differently constituted discursive arenas should not be confused with the commonly accepted definition of the public sector. Nor should the public domain be limited to the provision of public goods, a staple of modern liberal economic theory. The public domain is a sphere of political agency, first and foremost, in which individuals work together to meet collective needs and overcome complex political and economic challenges. *The public domain, above all else, is a forum in which to be heard.* This is a very different insight on what it means to be in public, but it is hardly radical. This definition of the public can be found in the political writings of Enlightenment philosophers and more recently, in the theoretical contributions of the aptly named and loosely defined recognitionist school of citizenship founded by Hannah Arendt and led today by Charles Taylor, Arjun Appadurai, and David Held.[13]

Recognitionism has become the dominant current in social science for thinking about the public domain. Even the term is new and its ideas reflect the need to transcend narrow academic disciplines such as law, economics, and political science. The irreversible trend toward the growth of democratic rights and the rule of law at the international level has gone hand in hand with a more inclusive approach to pluralism. Through this rights-based discourse the international community empowers governments to take collective responsibility for all their citizens. The urgent need to create pluralistic, diverse societies was born out of the catastrophic world wars of the twentieth century and the Holocaust. The colonial legacy of racism and social exclusion has been amply documented by anthropologists, historians, and cultural theorists. After 1945 societies began to rededicate themselves to humanist ideals best reflected in the growth of international human rights law. Philosophers have long argued that rights rest on a foundation of tolerance and social recognition. Without recognition of the uniqueness not only of individuals, but also religions, ethnicity, and cultures, there can be no strong system of human rights.

Recognitionism has struck a deep cord with researchers worldwide. Its theoretical contributions range from a deep study of the transcendent ethic of human rights, to the power of public reason as one of the motors of transformative social change. It also

presents a powerful explanation of collectively-minded individuals who form discursive communities of choice. The common thread that runs through the recognitionist school is plainly seen in the work of Charles Taylor, who declares that:

> our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves . . . due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people, it is a vital human need.[14]

This penetrating read of recognition draws directly on Hannah Arendt's theorization of the public as the primary site of recognition and the terrain of individual achievement. Hannah Arendt was one of the great postwar theorists of the twentieth century. She believed that a liberal society in a social democratic age was rooted in public transparency and individual actions performed in public.

The right to have rights: the wide-angled vision of the Recognitionist school

David Held explored the implications of this vital collective need. His key contribution is a sophisticated theorization of how the transfer of power from national to international levels has shifted the locus of citizenship. The cosmopolitan citizen does not need to choose between the community and identity that they were born into and the communities of choice that they belong to outside the traditional boundaries of their states and societies. At any time they may belong in multiple spheres of political interaction maintaining overlapping ideas and identities. Other schools of thought in this vein include the neo-Gramscians such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri who have gained a large following in cultural studies.[15] Also the Network Society thesis of Manuel Castells has been influential among those scholars who are interested in mapping the shifting sands of structuralism.[16]

Uniquely Arjun Appadurai stands apart as a theorist of misrecognition. He shows how new forms of wealth generated by

electronic markets have increased the gap between the rich and the poor. This phenomenon, coupled with fast-moving technologies of communication and highly unstable financial markets, produces anxieties about people's identities. And these anxieties hold new potential for violence.[17]

No matter the school of thought, much attention has been focused on "things public" and the way we think about them because the one thing that all scholars now agree upon is that the public domain will be the defining arena of conflict and progress in the twenty-first century. The modern and multidimensional public domain has expanded beyond the bounds of elites and the control of the political class. As a body of public opinion, the sphere of interactive communication has lost its social exclusivity. You don't have to attain a high level of education to be part of it. You can be a teenager at a cyber-café, a tenant renter in Bombay, a soccer mom, a boomer retiree, or from any of the inner cities of the world. The 1 billion person e-universe has not yet reached its limits. It keeps on expanding at the blistering pace of more than 10 percent annually. And many of the issues debated and discussed, such as the rights of children, once exclusively the prerogative of the private sphere of the family, are now subject to the public's scrutiny.

In an era of globally connected networks of communicative interaction, the personal is not only political, it is also public. Whereas Habermas thought that the institutions of modern society and government frequently attempted a refeudalization of the public sphere, in which bureaucratic interests trap the public in a clientelistic relationship with public authority, we think that modern communication technologies, which blur the lines between public and private, citizen and client, have widened the access points into public discourse and offer a phenomenal opportunity to democratize the public domain. Over the past three decades, the public domain has become more diverse, conflictual, and internally differentiated. More than ever, it is a sphere where theory, possibility, and the virtual can become real.

The early modern conception of the public was rooted in a complex understanding of what it means to be an individual – a person with many different values, goals, aspirations, and motivations. If liberalism in political theory has given us a robust view of

the individual living in society, then economic liberalism offers a one-dimensional caricature of the individual. Economic theory simplifies the concept of the socially embedded individual. The economic individual is a rational maximizer, a person who sees the world in terms of self-interest, economic utility, and scarcity. For the economic individual, the public does not exist as a significant category. Society is the totality of all individuals and is rooted in market activity. Those goods that individuals are unable to produce are produced through collective effort. These "public goods," such as national defense, are the rationale for a public sector. But there is no room in this view for a notion of public goods and the public good that is separate from economic need and the self-interest of individuals. When Margaret Thatcher pronounced in her famous 1987 interview with *Woman's Own* magazine that "there is no such thing" as society, she was simply reducing liberal economic theory to its foundational assumption.

The search for theoretical clarity about the modern idea of the public

Most people intuitively understand a concept of the "public" that sharply contrasts the understanding of Baroness Thatcher and other neo-liberal thinkers. For nineteenth-century liberals and twenty-first-century social conservatives the public stands in contrast to the private world of the family and the everyday experience of work. In the present we tend to define the public in terms of openness and inclusiveness with regards to the actions performed in public spaces as well as the attitudes and values that define "public" values. When we think of the public as an ideal institution, we think of the Keynesian welfare state as a step up from the watchman liberal state. When we think of the kinetic energy of crowds and the revolutionary potential of the public, we think of the *citoyens sans culottes*. When we imagine the capacity of the public to reason about the common good, we think of the American founding fathers who came together to throw off the yoke of colonialism and build the first modern democracy. Public reason, for James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and Alexander Hamilton, was an active process of thinking about the possibilities

for a collective future, not the passive process of public opinion polling that passes for the general will today. All of these are part of what it means to be in public, yet we need to find our way out of the definitional morass that holds us back from thinking of the public today as an interactive environment in which we, as individuals, play a valuable autonomous role just as citizens have repeatedly done in the past.[18]

What is the relationship between the public as an institution, the public as a force for change, and the public as a body capable of thought and reason? Can our knowledge of the public even hold all of these concepts at once? The answers lie in the way we define the noun "public." In common parlance the public refers to space that is owned or supervised by the state, or the people who gather together in such a space. In this usage, people in public have little in common except their wish to experience some aspect of social life together, such as a speech, concert, or political protest. But this is not always what has been meant by "public."

Hannah Arendt reminds us that in classical antiquity the public was a space of appearance and recognition, a space where individuals were recognized and actions could be judged. A person was affirmed in their individuality and recognized for their achievements in public. This idea dovetails nicely with Habermas's idea that public acts of assembly and speech have the power to change the ways in which we are governed and the policies pursued by our governments. Public debate sets the rules by which society is governed. Every controversial action on the part of government is debated first in the public sphere. In this way we can understand the notion of the public to have yet another critical dimension. It is a sphere of uniquely endowed communicative action in which citizens can reach consensus on divisive and complex issues. From these definitions, we can imagine the public to be the decisive space for recognition as well as the sphere of choice for individuals whose action is informed by the process of reasoning together.

Our common belief of what it means to be in public is not far off this mark, but we have been misled as to the capacity of the public for collective action because our definition of what it means to be an individual has been so thoroughly informed by economic theory. The classical appreciation of individualism emphasized

the ability to reason with other people and the capacity to be recognized in public. Before economic liberalism claimed a monopoly on the concept of individualism and Marxism claimed the realm of collective action, classical political theory imagined that individuals need the public and that the public needs individuals. Contemporary citizen practice has reclaimed this older tradition of the individual and the public – a symbiotic relationship that was never properly understood by thinkers in the conservative and radical traditions.

The great reversal: devolving power downwards

So far the "great reversal" consists of *three constant and cyclical phases*. First, in the beginning period of globalization, political and regulatory powers were transferred away from the state and into the command and control structures of global financial corporations. In the early 1980s, markets for money were deregulated in the United States and corporate financiers were given new powers to redirect massive flows of capital as they saw fit. The value of derivatives markets and hedge funds skyrocketed into the trillions of dollars. New rights, and the attendant wealth and privilege, were given to the few; countless workers with well-paying jobs were stripped of economic security. In the words of Martin Wolf, the lead economic reporter for the *Financial Times*, "there has been a big income shift from labour to capital – managers can earn vast multiples of employees' wages."[19] The shocking extent to which this power transfer had taken place without the public being the wiser was first revealed by the spectacular collapses of Enron in 2001, Worldcom in 2002, and the Hollinger newspaper empire in 2005.

At the same time, technological change drove the other side of this double movement in which communicative power funneled downward from the few toward the many. In every historical epoch, the Innisian bias of communication has had the potential to topple hierarchies and facilitate the radical transfer of political power. This does not happen the way that Marx imagined, with workers seizing control of the commanding heights of the economy. Rather it happens because information becomes a

currency of exchange, and technological change democratizes access to information. Ironically, Marx was partially right. When the production of information becomes the highest goal of societies, digital technology and the Internet allow anyone to control their own means of information production. New technology encourages opportunities for social action and amplifies the voice of the activist.

Second, just as printed text was instrumental to the birth of modern forms of national identity, so hypertext has given birth to the powerful idea of the global citizen connected to other citizens through the networked public. Print capitalism presaged nationalism, national community, and state sovereignty as Benedict Anderson has shown.[20] The printing press, the map, and the museum constructed the ideal of the nation even as people's lived experience remained firmly rooted in the local with no real identity beyond the village gate. At the time of the French Revolution only 11 percent of the population spoke French. Information moved at a snail's pace and even as late as the 1860s a quarter of French army recruits only knew patois. The same is true today of the Internet, the satellite, and the news broadcast, which construct the possibility of an idealized global village, a term coined by Marshall McLuhan, even as most people remain local actors.

The dominant feature of globalization has been a slow bleeding of power from the national level, toward regional organizations, international institutions, and non-governmental actors. Information flows are behind this structural transformation, and Manuel Castells demonstrates the way in which new informational processes create a new form of consciousness today in the global "network society."[21] A pessimistic reading of this process is that national sovereignty has been subverted, and the nation-state is being hollowed out by multinational corporations. A more optimistic reading focuses on the way that citizens are developing new forms of engagement to achieve their goals at a time when the old templates of authority and loyalty no longer fit the contours of social life.

Finally, these new citizenship practices have become the motivating ethos for emergent forms of transnational public action. Micro-activism is the idea that individuals can make a difference through their actions wherever they live, work, or meet. Micro-activism is

entrepreneurial in the Schumpterian sense because it creates new
political forms where none existed before; projects are undertaken in
an ad hoc way, with individuals rising to take action on an issue that
they feel strongly about and disengaging after they have made a con-
tribution. Micro-activists recognize that they can participate in the
public sphere without devoting decades to gaining credentials and
developing the legitimacy of a specialist. In a very real way, micro-
activists recognize there can be no individuality without being in
public, and there can be no public without a concrete understanding
of others as individuals with their own hopes, dreams, and desires.
None of this is to suggest that the act of being in public or the rea-
soning of micro-activists is necessarily enlightened or progressive.
Publics are often just as reactionary as the worst dictators. Activists
can be informed and forward-looking, or biased and prejudiced.
They can be autonomous, independent-minded, and contrarian. Or
they can be moulded, manipulated, and kept on a short leash by
elites.

Pessimism about 'things public' and the need for dissent

Today, more than at any other time in the recent past, the public
domain has to be understood and defined as an arena of activism,
with its own rules, norms, and practices, which cut across the state
and market and other public-private agencies.[22] The public
domain's values are those of citizenship, activism, and the notion
of the public interest. It has long furnished civil society with the
much needed resources to function effectively by creating sanctu-
aries where the price mechanism does not operate. The public
domain was "ring-fenced from the pressures of the market place, in
which citizenship rights rather than market power governed the
allocation of social goods."[23]

The popular perception has been that the public domain beyond
the state is troubled and in decline after a long period of studied
neglect. Following the Second World War, there was strong support
among academics and policy makers on both sides of the Atlantic
for a more robust sharing of power between state and international
institutions. While realists argued that peace would be maintained
by a nuclear balance of power, the institution building of idealists

promised a more equitable world order than that which had given birth to the bloody twentieth century. Several long decades later, during the Washington Consensus era, it was accepted as self-evident truth that the most important regulatory and economic management processes occurred beyond the territorial boundaries of the nation-state – an idea lifted from the idealist traditions, but twisted by the rhetoric of market triumphalism to suit the needs of ambitious multinational corporations. Now, more than ever, the public domain has been reinvigorated by the great debate between those who see the international public domain as a space of discourse and public reason and those who see it as primarily an arena for market exchange.

The fact is that this notion of neo-liberal international regulation has been increasingly challenged because the nation-state has not crumbled as the seat of public authority as once predicted by experts of all stripes. This is the third dimension of the discourse. Markets and publics are not clashing in outer space. Publics draw upon the authority of the state in their attempt to counter the overreach of market actors – and it appears that this strategy may yet bear fruit. Public spending has risen steadily throughout the neo-liberal era. The state has not been hollowed out though it is leaner than it once was. Elites are divided on which model of the public is relevant to national needs and priorities. State spending in Germany, France, Sweden, and Italy is well above the 40 percent mark of gross domestic product (GDP). In the global south too, no one would claim that the declinist theory applies to India, China, Brazil, or Argentina.[24]

Amartya Sen rightly notes that dissent and criticism are now widely perceived to be legitimate alternatives to deference, paternalism, and autocratic authority.[25] The process of doubting and questioning that began at the height of Western market triumphalism has climaxed in a great U-turn of political power. Dissenters, activists, and new social movements have begun to rescue the idea of the public from the economic determinism of the Washington Consensus world order. Its market-oriented policies framed public policy in the 1980s and 1990s and were synonymous with structural adjustment, aggressive privatization, public deregulation, and the cutting of social programs to meet

strict deficit targets. The theology of market fundamentalism rejected the concept of a public sphere to promote equity, democracy, and transparency; yet the return of the public domain is undoubtedly the watershed event of our times.

The observant reader will not overlook the two defining moments that provide the context and focus of the current cycle of dissent. The first was a decision at the summit of the European Union's leaders in July 2007 to take the unprecedented step to remove from its constitution a commitment to "free and undistorted competition," the core idea of global neo-liberalism. This will potentially have far-reaching implications for the rebalancing of the European Union's priorities. EU ministers are beginning to see the need to get right the balance between public and private in the modern mixed economy. The new skepticism about neo-liberal policy goals is represented, paradoxically, in the dynamic leadership of new French president Nicolas Sarkozy, whose right-wing populism has captivated French voters. He has emerged as the leader of the hour, who is symbolically committed to reducing the EU's total commitment to liberalization.

The Sarkozy backlash against globalization and his demand that the EU reorder its priorities is in part a response to a large and growing majority who want governments to distance themselves from the free-market theology. European governments are seeking "more flexibility" – the code words for moving away from the strict letter of the old dictates that outlawed public sector cost overruns, wantonly privatized hundreds of state enterprises, and weakened the regulatory clout of public authority. It now appears that France will not meet the European Union's stability pact through 2012, a fact that barely produces a ripple in Brussels or the leading financial centers of the EU. Evidently the tide of privatization has long crested and governments see the need for smart interventionist strategies to address structural adjustment and brutal competitive pressures.

Second, the dramatic collapse of the Doha round of WTO trade negotiations provides a companion bookend to this time of upheaval. The international order has entered into a new political cycle. Developing countries are no longer willing to be bullied into making trade deals they regret. Equally, northern governments are

less enthusiastic about trade liberalization at a time when voters are angry over globalization's social costs. The creativity and hard work of global micro-activists has had a major impact on this shift in global attitude. The great free-trade machine no longer rules the international community unchallenged.

The structure of the argument

The first chapter examines one of the most prominent arenas in the battle between public and private – the World Trade Organization. Originally conceived as simply an extension of the legal rules for trade governance, the WTO now is the most contentious governance institution in the world. Its elite, technocratic mode of operation drew the wrath of activists and public intellectuals who saw it as an antidemocratic tool of capitalist expansion. The great theoretical debates of public policy have always been about managing the delicate relationship between public and private. Karl Polanyi captured this push-pull dynamic in his classic work, *The Great Transformation*.[26] He and many others have remarked on how the international financial institutions developed at the end of the Second World War provided an institutional safety net for fragile economies and troubled markets. The WTO was the next logical step in the growth of the institutional architecture for global trade, but liberal internationalism has become a battleground for competing theoretical approaches for balancing private interest and the public good. The WTO is a prescient example of how the organizing know-how of activists and the galvanizing power of public anger are transforming the international public domain in important new directions with respect to international jurisprudence.

The second chapter argues that it is critically important to track and map the contested existence of "things public." There is no one public for everyone, and we need to come to terms with the modern idea and ideal of the public domain in which our purposes, values, and goals are inescapably *public*. What is new today is that the once state-centered public domain has splintered into many different spheres; the sphere of interactive communication has extended its frontiers and provided organizing capacity to those who did not possess it in the past. Micro-activism is about

challenging the power of elites for democratic ends; it has different motivations, agendas, and influences, but remains starkly populist and anti-authoritarian. Voting patterns reflect this mood swing and uncertainty. The young, urban, educated voter is showing a preference for coalition governments and unorthodox right-left coalitions.

The third and fourth chapters show how powerful, internationally-minded publics have learned to use worldwide information flows as a discursive weapon. There are still doubts among many academics and policy elites as to the efficacy of public activism. They see the public as people who are dumbed down by mass culture and rendered voiceless by the tandem command and control models of state and market power. But the public has never been phantom-like, the trivializing term Walter Lippman coined to explain its alleged disinterest in public issues.[27] Modern publics in different regions of the planet have shed their perceived docility.

How can we understand the modern notion of publicness as collective voice and strategy? Micro-activism has created a unique global political culture that challenges the mainstream ideals of social and political conformity. Furthermore, civil society and social movements are developing their capacity to innovate and create new political forms and practices, a fact that has become strikingly apparent since the "battle in Seattle" in 1999. We examine the reasons why the decline of deference has produced an almost perfect storm of popular activism worldwide. Hypertext, disgruntled publics, and micro-activism have triggered the improbable U-turn of our times.

The rebels and activists of today are nothing like the global protest movements of 1968. The radical movements of that time culminated in factory occupations, millions of anti-war protesters marching in the streets, Paris under siege, and America's inner cities burning. The fourth chapter argues that we need to think beyond the constructed legacy of the golden age of anti-Vietnam protest that shook the political order of capitalism to its core and instead look at the possibility for citizen engagement today and down the road. This fixation with the anti-war Vietnam protest movement is now a strategic obstacle to finding a way to see beyond our con-

temporary present-mindedness. Nostalgia for this former age locks the cynic-observer into a mind-set where capitalism can only be victorious.

The fifth and final chapter examines how the forces of space, place, and citizenship are creating infinite varieties of the public. Triumphant liberalism, far from being a universal program for all, is on a collision course with surly and informed global publics. The growth of new state practices and growing institutional divergence across jurisdictions needs to be examined, interrogated, and put into perspective. The globalization mythology is being recast for a new era; and in the process, citizens have loosened economic integration from its deterministic moorings. Are these in reality significant markers of a new political chapter in the offing? Or is it only a cyclical dip in public thinking? We argue that social diversity and new models of citizenship have become constituent elements in explaining the return of the public domain at the state and global levels. The filters and frames that once kept the public largely disaggregated and out of harm's way are less and less effective. New modes of communication, and the organizations they help create, are fundamentally transforming the way that politics happens. The question is now, who will rule the future?

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