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Whither the State When It Acts Through Markets? The Case of Pesticide Reduction in the Vineyard of Bordeaux

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The dangers of extensive pesticide usage for human health and ecosystems have been known since the 1960s, so why do states throughout the world continue to allow this practice to continue? Why, for example, is France still the third largest consumer country in this domain, and why do its vineyards account for a fifth of this consumption? (INRA, 2006). Functionalist answers to these questions in terms of 'the need to feed the world' are unconvincing given the alternatives available and the social choices that could have been made. Indeed, this is particularly patent in the case of wine, a product that, despite its symbolic value, can hardly be seen as keeping people alive. Equally, material determinist explanations of the persistence of pesticides in terms of 'the interests' of chemical producers, growers and merchants beg the question of who has been defining such interests and how they have been made to coincide with 'the public interest' attributed to local or national societies. Similar explanations in terms of 'the power of neo-corporatist arrangements between interest groups and the state' are also over-general and incapable of capturing the dynamism of political economies.

The alternative explanation developed by much of the sociologically-influenced social sciences is to focus analytical attention upon the very process of defining and conciliating interests that lies at the heart of the relationships between states and economies. Although this fundamental postulate is widely recognized within our respective disciplines, nevertheless a great deal of disagreement and confusion remains over precisely how and why states intervene in and fit with economic activity. Having first briefly set out reasons for this state of affairs regarding research on the state, and in particular its sub-optimal effects upon the generation of knowledge about why representatives of states act as they do, the remainder of this article is devot-

ed more positively to outlining a different approach that places greater emphasis upon what occurs within states themselves and its relationship to a range of societal actors. This approach is refined here around a precise, yet generalizable question: what happens to a state when it acts through markets? It is then illustrated with data from a case study of how professional training is currently being used by the French state as a primary means of regulating pesticide usage in a specific territory and productive system: the vineyard of Bordeaux.

Overall, by melding institutionalist theory to constructivist concepts and methods, a key finding is that, at least in the wine industry, representatives of the French state now firmly believe in the virtues of externalizing such training via a market. More fundamentally still, given that this market is skewed heavily towards those who essentially seek to reproduce extensive pesticide usage, this case study also reveals that in this instance at least, and in many others we can only hypothesize, French state representatives have given up on defining the public interest and acting in its name.

1 States, Economies and Markets: Towards a More Dynamic Framework

Deep Lessons in Need of Fresh Air

Since the pioneering writings of authors such as Marx, Weber and Polanyi, social science has broadly embraced the postulate that states and economic activity are deeply interdependent. On the one hand, the development of each state has been largely rendered possible by that of its economy, the goods and services generated as well as the fiscal reservoir this has created. On the other hand, a major condition for encouraging durable economic activity has been the emergence of the state as a maker and enforcer of rules, norms and conventions.

As is well known, since the mid-1980s, sociological neoinstitutionalism has retheorized the second part of the above 'equation' and convincingly shown how these institutions structure and orientate economic activity. Building upon the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu (2000), Neil Fligstein (2001) in particular has highlighted not only how 'the architecture of markets' is made up of institutions, but also the extent to which the state acts as their guarantor. More specifically, his contention is that by being principally outside the 'fields' within which economic activity takes place, representatives of the state intervene as 'third parties'. In so doing they sometimes arbitrate between dominant actors and their challengers, but more often simply mediate their co-existence (Fligstein, 1996). Overall, for Fligstein as for Bourdieu (2000: 250), the state is never neutral when it intervenes in different parts of the economy, and this because a separate 'bureaucratic field' overhangs and strongly influences all its meso and micro level interventions.

At first sight this conceptualization of the relationship between states and their economies is highly seductive. First it dovetails with other, less sociological, literatures that have sought to capture how each state has regulated its economy (Boyer, 2004) and, in so doing, created singular but comparable 'varieties of capitalism' (Hall and Soskice, 2001). Second, it neatly distinguishes between actors who are 'economic' (firms and their representatives) from those who are 'political' (politicians and civil servants), thus chiming with a cleavage in everyday use promoted by these actors themselves and the media.

Notwithstanding their usage by a wide range of economists, political scientists and sociologists, defining 'politics' and 'bureaucracy' as quintessentially national and partly external to economic activity is deeply problematic. Firstly, as we have shown in detail elsewhere (Jullien and Smith, 2014), given the impact of both international and European scales and the range of ways state representatives intervene in different industries, today at least it makes little sense to obstinately search for national patterns and types. Instead, a focus upon comparing specific industries and their respective markets is more appropriate and methodologically robust. More specifically, each industry needs conceptualizing as an Institutional Order composed of four groupings of inter-connected Institutionalized Relationships (IRs): Employment, Finance, Sourcing and Commercial (Jullien and Smith, 2008). Each of these IRs is also crisscrossed by a number of Trans-Industry Regulations (Fiscal, competition and environment policy, etc.), all of which ostensibly apply to all industries. Tensions within an industry are thus typically either inter-IR or between an IR and Trans-Industry Regulations. In the case of wine in Bordeaux, for example, reinforced European and national legislation over pesticide usage potentially affects first the Sourcing IR by setting limits upon how grapes are treated with chemicals. However, because of the perceived risks and opportunities associated with changing agronomic practices, the legislation could also become an issue within the industry's Employment (e.g. health and safety, labour ratios), Finance (support from banks) and Commercial (pricing, labelling) IRs.

Indeed, it is precisely over whether or not issues in these IRs are transformed into 'public problems' (Rochefort and Cobb, 1994) that a second step forward for research needs to be made by embracing agency and abandoning the anthropomorphic definitions of politics that still dominate socioeconomic analysis. Instead of limiting politics to what politicians or administrators do, it is defined here as all activity that seeks to change or reproduce institutions by mobilizing or silencing values (Smith, 2013). One of the advantages of this definition is that it focuses analytical attention upon the co-production of the economy's institutions by contingent hierarchies of actors within which state representatives may, or may not, play a dominant role. In so doing, this approach builds upon the concept of 'institutional work' which highlights the importance of agency in the creation and reproduction of economic institutions (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006; François, 2011). More specifically, we hypothesize that such work becomes 'political' around either the explicit evocation of values (politicization), or their downplaying (technicization), through which struggles for institutional change or stasis are legitimized.

A Focus Upon States Acting Through Markets

In applying this approach to the issue of pesticide reduction, the angle on the state-economy relationship developed here is why, how and with what effects have segments of many contemporary states chosen to act upon public problems by creating markets? Over the last thirty years this practice has become increasingly common in issue areas ranging from health and infrastructures to energy, a trend over which research has produced three broad interpretations but little in the way of causal evidence.

The first of these lines of analysis is centred upon reforms of the state. It postulates that inspired and legitimated by neo-classical economics, advocates of New Public Management (NPM) have become dominant within states themselves. In so doing, one of their priorities has been to 'externalise' much pre-existing state activity by creating

markets for the provision of public services by private actors. Much valuable research has been devoted to this question (Saint-Martin, 2001; Pollit and Bouckaert, 2004; Bezes, 2009). However, little knowledge has thus far been generated on the precise causes of state representatives choosing to intervene via markets, nor upon their effects in terms of political economy.

This question is addressed more directly by a second strand of research focused upon policy instruments. Having examined the production and implementation of such instruments in the British health and local government fields, Le Galès and Scott go so far as to conclude that recourse to market mechanisms has actually strengthened the state (2008; Faucher-King and Le Galès, 2007). More precisely, this strengthening is attributed to state representatives developing through markets a capacity to 'govern at arm's length' and thus avoid the trap of neo-corporatist relationships with socio-economic actors. Although this thesis merits taking seriously, the research behind it has yet to either seriously study the long-term effects of this mode of governing, nor its numerous failures (eg. British railways). Consequently it risks guiding research to overestimate both the actual capacity of state actors to orientate economic activity through markets, as well as their continued willingness to do so.

Indeed, the third and final interpretation of states operating via markets argues conversely that this practice reflects a loss of state power in general, and its transfer to business elites in particular (Jobert 2003; Crouch, 2005 & 2011). According to this view, state actors have given up large swathes of interventions by either transferring them to public-private partnerships or by recalibrating their own practices upon the template of the private corporation. This process is seen as self-perpetuating because, in so doing, states have lost much of the expertise and personnel they once had, thus further delegitimizing themselves by becoming both 'uninformed' and 'powerless'. As seductive as this thesis seems, however, little research has thus far been undertaken to validate it.

Overall, these three views on why states have increasingly sought to intervene in the socio-economy through markets are both stimulating and frustrating because they all promise important lines of enquiry but fail to follow through with adequate methods and data. Fully conscious that our modest study of pesticide reduction in the Bordelais cannot on its own pretend to plug the gaps created, nor by any means totally capture what the state-economy relationship

has become, the following pages are nevertheless an attempt to head research in this direction by wedding our limited empirical example to the theoretical and conceptual propositions traced above.

2 A State-Created Market for Certifying Pesticide Users: Rules and Dependencies

Reducing pesticide usage has recently been given impetus by a European Union (EU) directive from 2009 (EC 128/2009) and, in France, by a series of measures adopted after a 'national debate' on environmental protection (le Grenelle de l'environnement) that same year. Socio-economic actors from Bordeaux's vineyard have reacted to this trend, and partly anticipated it, through a range of adjustments that include financing better meteorological instruments and creating networks to encourage the transfer of 'best practices'. In this way, they have sought to confine the 'problem' of pesticide reduction to an issue of 'reasonable usage' by individual growers. Meanwhile, from the point of view of the state, and in line with the directive, the principal policy instrument used has been a programme, located within the industry's Employment IR, which seeks to train and certify all pesticide users by the end of 2013: Certyphyto. If EU legislation sets out the broad content of this programme, it has not however imposed the process through which it should be implemented. In the French case, national and local representatives of the state have thus freely chosen to delegate the training of pesticide users to non-state actors by putting in place a market for this purpose. By examining first the creation of this market then its regulation, data regarding the positioning and power of state actors will be highlighted1. In so doing, it will also be shown why the 'problem' of pesticide usage has been reduced to one of training individuals to disseminate chemicals 'reasonably' into the environment.

A market reinforcing state dependence upon service providers

The first steps in creating this market entailed the French state publishing a call for participants, then validating their applications. In the Bordelais, four principal operators, all already heavily involved in agricultural training, applied and were accepted as participants: the Chamber of Agriculture, Public Education and Training Schools, a 'rural development' association (*les Maisons Familiales Rurales*) and, more unusually, a major supplier of pesticides (Vitivista Ltd.). In so doing, other potential trainers advocating alter-

native crop treatment methods, such as associations of organic producers, were excluded from the outset.

From the point of view of the selected operators, Certyphyto was seen as a considerable opportunity firstly because in the Gironde alone in 2009 there were 9432 registered farmers. 7400 of these grew grapes and employed in total 25.000 workers, most of whom would have to obtain a certificate to use pesticides by the end of 2013. At a time when numbers of farmers and farm employees in France are continuing to decline, conducting courses within the Certyphyto programme was seen as a considerable opportunity to make profits.

Indeed, for all of these operators this opportunity was also of great interest because it logically would enable them to train and thus be in contact with a range of farmers and growers with whom they had never had, or no longer had, a relationship. In the name of 'the crisis' that had affected wine prices in the mid-2000s, many growers had cut back on both their training and pesticide budgets. In the first instance this meant they were decreasingly in contact with the Chamber of Agriculture and Public Training Schools on the one hand, and had less dealings with companies selling pesticides, on the other. As a representative of the Chamber put it on interview: 'Today the difficulty is to get farmers to undertake professional training. We have trouble getting them to come and one needs bait. Because certification was compulsory, we had our bait'. Training farmers and growers so they obtained a Certyphyto certificate was thus seen as enabling all these organisations to establish or re-establish links around which other services could later be marketed and sold.

Of course, these market opportunities cannot be separated from the pricing arrangements put in place by the French state. From the point of farmers and growers the key point here is that the two-day courses were free of charge, and thus subsidized 100% by the state and training fund financed by levies on all agricultural products (VIVEA). This aspect of the market was clearly attractive to operators, notably with a mind to the long-term relationships they hoped to expand around Certyphyto. But the main attraction was a system of pricing which generously remunerated these operators to the tune of 22euros per hour and per trainee from 2009 to 2011. Even if thereafter this price was reduced to 15 euros, this was still seen as a profitmaking exercise to be engaged in with vigour.

The final aspect of the creation of this market that reveals just how much the state was prepared to bend over backwards to set it in motion, concerns the procedures for validating candidate operators. Given that all the latter had developed environmental-protection training modules over the previous decade, they had little difficulty in satisfying the criteria set out by the Ministry of Agriculture concerning the content of each training module. Indeed, our interviews confirm that the actual content proposed by each operator was not examined closely by representatives of the state, and certainly not with a view to reinforcing messages as regards the damaging effects of pesticides for human health and the environment. More importantly still, nor were operators specifically encouraged by the state to include in their training the alternative production methods adopted by growers committed to 'bio' or 'bio-dynamic' viticulture. Rather, as the representative of Vitivista Ltd. put it on interview, applying 'was an administrative procedure, that's all. What we had to do was put the right people with the right CVs in the right boxes'. To quote an agent of the funding agency VIVEA: 'as soon as they applied we accepted them. We did not make any selections'. State representatives justified this policy of non-choice in the name of the 'urgency' of getting all the target population certified in time. But of course this bureaucratic construction of time is by no means neutral. Indeed, it is highly revealing of the priorities and values of the state actors concerned, and in particular of their low level of commitment to pesticide reduction.

In summary, the creation of this market for training grape growers in the Bordelais did not oblige the organizations to do anything different from what they were already doing (so imposed no investment costs), did not make them compete amongst each other at this stage and thus ended up as being a mere process of registration. No entry barriers were raised, thus largely reproducing from the outset the (low) constraints on pesticide usage present in the local wine industry's Employment IR and, above all, preventing them spilling over into the Sourcing, Finance and Commercial IRs.

Market regulation when the state stands aside

Once in place, competition between the four operators for trainees began in earnest. For the reasons listed earlier, each organization re-arranged itself internally so as to attract clients quickly and thereby make the most of the generous pricing system. What is of much greater analytical interest, however, is the role representatives of the

state have played since 2009. Whereas advocates of the 'strengthened state' hypothesis might have expected these actors to intervene regularly with consistent demands that differentiated themselves clearly from commercial operators, in practice they have generally stood back and allowed these training organizations to act as they see fit.

The first issue that many would have thought the state representatives would be active over concerns the provision of information about the new regulatory requirements. Given that such basic information is generally seen as a pre-requisite for 'efficient' markets, many would indeed see the state as its logical provider. In the Bordelais case, however, private operators have dominated information provision to growers through thinly disguised forms of advertising. Not only have state representatives not intervened over cases of advertising that slightly distorted the regulatory requirements, they have also soft-pedalled over a blatant case of abuse of dominant position. This case concerns the Chamber of Agriculture and, more specifically, the relationship between the département-scale Chamber and that at the scale of the region. Whereas in the past both were ostensibly integrated, a formal separation now exists which allows the organization at the département-scale to dispense training commercially whilst their regional counterparts receive state and EU subsidies to provide information to all farmers and growers, regardless of their direct links to the Chamber of their département. In this instance, however, the regional Chamber's information contained a distinct bias towards its organizational cousins. On interview, an actor from the regional organization admitted that they had been slightly 'told off' about this. But no further action has been taken.

Once the training courses were up and running, one might also have expected state representatives to seek to regulate the market they had created by monitoring it through spot-checks which, under French law, are supposed to be obligatory. However, by the time we conducted our interviews in mid-2012, no such controlling events had taken place. Instead, some representatives of the funding mechanism, VIVEA, had visited the occasional training course on an ad hoc basis, and this having received no prior training themselves and with no legal authority to back their opinions up. Given the unsystematic and informal nature of these exercises, unsurprisingly they found what they witnessed to be 'coherent'. But the state itself has not even given itself the opportunity to formulate any point of view on this subject.

Indeed, given this lack of monitoring it is also not surprising that each of the operators concerned has designed their training courses slightly differently. For example, some bring in external experts on subjects like health and safety, whereas others just make do with their own personnel. The issue here, of course, is ultimately the value of the certification being promoted and part-financed by the public purse. On one level this value can be immediately questioned because any farmer or grower who stays until the end of their two-day course will get a certificate, regardless of whether they really followed its content or not. In keeping with the bureaucratic logic behind policyimplementation in this region, because there is no exam or test, all participants are simply certified. In some instances the co-operative movement has taken a stand over the quality of training provided by advising its members to only take courses it has validated. But observation of how the co-operatives have played this brokering role in some instances only serves to highlight the generalized absence of the state even more.

Moreover, the question of the value of Certyphyto can and should of course be analysed at the deeper level of the ideological standpoints and power relations its implementation reveals. Why have state actors stood back and allowed commercial operators to make the most of the funding on offer without putting in place criteria-driven demands upon them? Why are the only criteria ever used purely bureaucratically concerned with meeting the requirements of national and EU law? Why, in a wine region known to be polluting its environment and putting its workers at risk with pesticides, have representatives of the state not developed and fought to impose a tougher policy-line in the name of the general interest?

More research obviously needs to be undertaken to fully answer these deep questions, but at this stage two levels of reply have emerged. The first concerns how state representatives now interpret their own overall social and socioeconomic role. After years of digesting 'New Public Management' discourse and staff reductions due to budget cuts, many of the actors now consider it natural to reduce the regulatory role of the state. Secondly, and more fundamentally, this stance is seen as so 'normal' that it is any suggestion they should be acting otherwise that is seen as deviant. For example, in our interviews with state agents we repeatedly encountered a faith in externalization as an efficient and unproblematic means of making 'supply' meet 'demand'. Indeed, in virtually all these interviews it was as if the postulates of simplistic versions of neo-

classical economics, so prevalent now in French society at large, were merely being recited to us as if from a hymn book.

Conclusion

The case study presented here of pesticide reduction in the Bordelais has revealed and analysed an instance of how contemporary representatives of a reputedly strong state now represent and practice their relationship to the economy. Contrary to the thesis that 'hands off' government has actually strengthened the state (Le Galès and Scott, 2008), here we have shown that its personnel actually consider that their role is to intervene minimally in the economy and, thereby, give free rein to commercial operators. Far from being just a rhetorical stance, this positioning has resulted in practice in training organizations using the liberty accorded them to actively reproduce a highly permissive approach to pesticide usage. Further research on the contemporary French state needs not only to focus on other sectors and other regions. It also needs to test whether representatives of the state located in Paris have reduced their ambitions as regards regulating the economy as much as their colleagues located in the Bordelais have done.

More generally, the article has set out an approach to the regulation of economic activity centred upon reproduction and change of institutions at the level of specific industries such as wine. Melding together an ontology and concepts from institutionalism and constructivism, we have shown how economic practices like pesticide usage are deeply anchored in an Institutional Order through its four Institutionalized Relationships (IRs). As with many other wine regions, in the Bordelais pesticide usage is so deeply ingrained in agronomic practice because since at least the 1950s it has lain at the heart of the wine industry's Employment, Finance, Sourcing and Commercial IRs. Recent EU and national legislation to alter the recourse to pesticides by growers could have had wide and deep ramifications for these IRs in the Bordelais. However, in this region as elsewhere, representatives of growers, training organizations and the state have conducted 'institutional work' in order to ensure that any discussion of pesticide usage remains confined to only the Employment IR. Controlled by employers, this IR has provided a safe haven for implementing externally imposed legislation in ways that have not 'contaminated' the other IRs. Little wonder then that productive and commercial practices in the Bordelais have barely been grazed by attempts to inject 'the general interest' into their regulation. However, the effacement of the

state that has occurred in this instance gives much greater cause for reflexion. Indeed, though facilitating the confinement of an issue to only one part of the industry's institutional order, our case study reveals an angle on the state's involvement in markets that could be of wider interest to all sociologies of political economies.

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Endnotes

1This data was principally gathered through 17 semi-structured interviews conducted in mid-2012 with protagonists working within the state, for producer interest groups or for training organizations. For example: Aquitaine's Chamber of Agriculture (Environment adviser); Gironde's Chamber of agriculture (the heads of its Environment and training teams); Vitivista Ltd. (the head of its Environment team); Ministry of agriculture, agrifood and forestry, Regional offices: its Training and development team (policy officer) and Pesticide and veterinary control team (head).

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