

SOLIDARITY ECONOMIES: THE COUNTERMOVEMENT RISING

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Introduction

The purpose of this research is to incorporate Polanyi's alternative conceptualization of the market and the accompanying principles into the study of solidarity economies that have intensified since the onset of neoliberal globalization. Solidarity economies are defined here as non-state, non-market economic organizations that undertake production and redistribution to employ the locally available economic resources in order to meet the needs of the locals. The economic functions of production and redistribution are socially embedded in organizational principles of workplace democracy and new labor solidarity. The reorganization of production and redistribution as the material basis of solidarity provides an alternative to the neoliberal economy based on flexible mode of production and welfare retrenchment. In addition, workplace democracy aims to construct democratic practice at the local level as a challenge to representative democracy that merely serves the neoliberal system by controlling the dangerous classes. Last, new forms of labor solidarity do not replace traditional labor unions but provide alternative venues to organize in, incorporating new items on the agenda and employing new strategies to mobilize.

Solidarity economies come in multiple forms in different parts of the world, finding their primary motivation within the local socioeconomic circumstances. Post-crisis Greece has many examples ranging from time banks to alternative local currencies, from local exchange trading systems to farmers' collectives. A more referred to example is the Movement of Landless Peasantry in Brazil. The sharing economy, freecycle movements, permaculture groups could be other forms where solidarity principles may organize economic life. Many such practices are based on alternative production schemes, collective ownership, undertaking of redistributive functions, and various forms of formal and informal mechanisms of solidarity. The research aims to expose the potential transformations that the crisis-ridden neoliberal globalization may face in the near future by providing a comparative

analysis of different forms of solidarity economies. Solidarity economy as a countermovement challenges not only neoliberalism but also the idea of a revolutionary overthrow. Instead, it represents the germination of a gradual, sporadic transformation that spreads through ceaseless change.

The paper will begin with an overview of Polanyi's principles of economic organization. A comparative analysis of the literature will expose the uniqueness of Polanyi's intervention in the analysis of the capitalist market. Second, the paper will define the concept of solidarity economy and interlocate it within a Polanyian perspective. This conceptual framework will be followed by a comparative analysis of these different forms, supported by ethnographic evidence from different cases. Finally, the paper will conclude by presenting the way Polanyi's conceptualization may be relevant in understanding the countermovement of solidarity economies.

Keywords: solidarity economy, redistribution, countermovements, labor movement

The Uniqueness of Polanyi's Analysis

Polanyi's long term historical analysis of the market economy has been a source of inspiration for critical researchers of the market economy. It is not only the economic organization and practice pertaining to the market that is under scrutiny, but also the discourse of liberalism as a source of justification of the social inequalities and disruptive nature of the market that is intricately analyzed.

Polanyi states that economic organization is in fact embedded in social relations at several instances in his magnum opus. The idea of "embeddedness" is one of the major challenges he poses against his contemporaries, including neoclassical and Keynesian economics. The idea of embeddedness overturns the understanding that economics is an abstraction of exchange relations in the market, reduced to a graphic interpretation of supply, demand and value. The

market as a domain of exchange and human interactions transcends the analytic limitations of its metaphoric expression in mainstream economics.

Another major challenge introduced by Polanyi's analysis is the redefinition of economic input of land, labor and capital as fictitious commodities (Polanyi 1967: 68-72). Polanyi bases his redefinition on the essence of humans' relationship to nature. In addition, as these so-called economic inputs are not produced to be bought and sold in the market, the process by which they are commodified is again an autistic abstraction that detaches these items from their social meaning. Land is in fact nature from which humans' acquire their basic needs. Labor is inherent in humans and it is stripped off its social meaning and social features once it becomes a commodity. The process of alienation is perhaps the most vivid expression of this social detachment. Finally, money, or in economic terms, capital is a human invention as a medium of exchange and it has inherently no value embedded in it.

Third and probably the most critical intervention Polanyi makes to the conventional analysis of political economy is the Polanyi problem or the double movement. While the liberal creed strongly underlines the free market as the *sine qua non* of a capitalist economy, Polanyi argues that the social repercussions of this free market necessitate regulation and intervention in the market. Polanyi's focus on the *double movement* represents the inherent contradictions of capitalism generating accumulation on the one hand and problems of social justice and redistribution that require market intervention on the other.

“While the organization of world commodity markets, world capital markets, and world currency markets under the aegis of the gold standard gave an unparalleled momentum to the mechanism of markets, a deep-seated movement sprang into being to resist the pernicious effects of a market-controlled economy. Society protected itself against the perils inherent in a self-regulating market system- this was the one comprehensive feature in the history of the age.” (Polanyi 1967: 76)

The movement towards the free market generates a countermovement to reverse the detrimental social impact of the free market idea. “That countermovement was in part driven by the struggle of capitalism’s victims to redress the balance of power, but it also involved the growth of institutions created to regulate capitalism and the abuses it fostered.” (Tarrow 2005: 17-18)

Finally, Polanyi discusses four pillars of economic organization, namely reciprocity, redistribution, symmetry and centricity. Drawing extensive anthropological evidence from the works of Malinowski and Thurnwald, Polanyi seeks to structure an alternative economic organization that is directly submerged in social life, as opposed to the liberal understanding of a free market dominated social organization. These principles are operational for the construction of an alternative understanding of material value, production, exchange relations and the organization of these interrelated processes. In fact, one of the main tasks of this research is to make use of these pillars in the definition of solidarity economies as a countermovement against neoliberal capitalism.

A deeper analysis of these major points is beyond the purpose and scope of this research. A more appropriate question to be scrutinized is the relevance of Polanyi’s conceptual framework in an analysis of contemporary alternatives against the capitalist economy. Polanyi’s analysis is currently more relevant than ever, as the course of the free market under neoliberal globalization has been highly detached from social organization and the productive capacity of the real economy.

Polanyian Analysis of Solidarity Economies

The research makes use of Polanyi’s analysis in two major respects. The first one rests upon Polanyi’s conceptualization of the non-market economy and the four pillars it stands on. One of the many important ideas Polanyi contributed to the critical analysis of capitalism was the principles of redistribution, reciprocity, symmetry, and centricity as the organizing pillars of a

socially embedded economy. The ethnographic account of a Melanesian society operating on these principles presents an alternative conceptualization of the market as a simple place of exchange instead of a dominating institution.

Accordingly, the economic organization of a non-market society rests upon principles of reciprocity, redistribution, symmetry and centrality (Polanyi 1967: 47-48). Reciprocity refers to the division of labor in the family, more specifically gender division of labor, and the interdependent production process based on family and kinship ties. Redistribution is not basically an egalitarian or a needs-based distribution of the produce; instead, it refers to the storing of a significant portion of the produce by the community leader to be redistributed on certain occasions. In addition to these two principles of behavior, Polanyi underlines the importance of complementary institutional patterns of symmetry and centrality. The principle of symmetry ensures the continuity of exchange relations even in the absence of formal records. Lastly, centrality as an institutional mechanism administers the collection, storage and redistributions functions for the whole of the community. These four principles are operational only in an interdependent, complementary manner.

“However, principles of behavior such as these cannot become effective unless existing institutional patterns lend themselves to their application. Reciprocity and redistribution are able to ensure the working of an economic system without the help of written records and elaborate administration only because the organization of the societies in question meets the requirements of such a solution with the help of patterns such as *symmetry* and *centrality*.”

(Polanyi 1967: 48)

The second way that Polanyi's analysis of the market economy contributes to this research is the concept of countermovement. Polanyi regards the countermovement as a social reaction against the expansion of the market. In a similar fashion, solidarity movements in this study function as a countermovement, against the expansion of the global market under the rubric of neoliberal globalization. The particular form of the countermovement may vary with

respect to the historical milieu of the capitalist world economy, the extent of penetration of market relations, or the existing social contracts prevalent in a certain social setting. The mechanisms by which the society chooses to protect itself may be diverse, such as the poor laws in the early industrialization period, social policy in the postwar period or solidarity in the global era. Given the extent of deregulation, privatization and current commitments to austerity, the neoliberal state ceases to be the primary actor of the countermovement to address the cost of the free market arrangement. While there could be alternative arrangements, possibility and social contracts, this research focuses on the solidarity economies as an agent of the countermovement in making. Irrespective of the particular form and context they come in; solidarity economies work to challenge the negative social impact of the market system:

“For a century, the dynamics of modern society was governed by a double movement: the market expanded continuously but this movement was met by a countermovement checking the expansion in definite directions. Vital though such a countermovement was for the protection of society, in the last analysis it was incompatible with the self-regulation of the market, and thus with the market system itself.” (Polanyi 1967: 130)

This alternative economic organization challenges the conventional conceptualizations and preconditions regarding the market economy and man’s propensity to truck, barter and exchange; or the stereotype of *homo economicus* seeking to maximize his utility while minimizing costs. Instead, it provides a vivid account of “a gainless marketless economy” that has been in practice at various historical periods in societies of various sizes (Polanyi 1967: 50-51). The task undertaken in this paper is to expose how these principles could provide a conceptual framework to analyze solidarity economies. The next section will provide a definition for solidarity economies and its organizing principles.

Solidarity Economies in Perspective

Neoliberal globalization extended the limits of labor exploitation and capital accumulation to unprecedented margins that resulted in not only poverty and inequality but also in polarization and misery (Castells 2000: 348). There have been numerous studies, proposals and attempts to reverse the detrimental impact of global capitalism and it is possible to categorize them in two main approaches. First, there is the taming of capitalism argument that comes in various conceptualizations such as social capitalism (Yunus 2010), capitalism with a human face, social market economy (Velo and Velo 2013) or relatively out of date welfare capitalism. Second, there is a line of alternative economic organizations diversely conceptualized as alternative economy, social economy (Amin 2009), solidary economy (Santos 2006), and solidarity economy (Aykac 2016). The second line is unique in the way it seeks to redefine the market as a place of exchange rather than an organic structure that has a life of its own.

Solidarity economy in this research is based on a synthetic definition of a non-market, non-state local economy that makes use of the immediately available resources, employing local labor and catering to a local market. As expected, such an economy will be inadequate in meeting all the needs in the society. Therefore, the objective of solidarity economies is not to replace the existing market, but rather open up economic enclaves free of global capitalism and its penetrating economic relations.

The synthetic definition of solidarity economy is based on four major principles. First, the reorganization of production in ways to counteract the corporate dominated global division of labor. The reorganization underlines the use of locally available resources and local labor in the production process in which the socially embedded economy will prioritize local returns to global ones, and prosperity over profit. This reorganization is not only a material concern but also a social one regarding autonomy of the production process and direct input of

workers in the decision making. Global production is dominated by multinational corporations with the primary motivation of profit making. Pumping of consumerism for artificial demand creation has become the rule rather than an exception.

Second, redistribution is an integral component of solidarity economies. For long, the classical, neo-classical economics have ignored the task of redistribution. It was only at the time of the postwar Keynesian consensus that the task of redistribution has been integrated in to economic policy of the welfare state, which has been a rather conjunctural model, confined to the historical trajectory of the postwar reconstruction boom. The economic discourse emphasizing growth and development provided multiple recipes for greater wealth generation but not necessarily about what to do with that wealth. Hence history is full of examples where growth and wealth generation has not really translated into social development. In addition, neoliberal globalization has lead to diminishing role of the state in regulating the economy, a wave of welfare retrenchment together with privatization of education, health care and social services. The impact of this retrenchment has worsened with the widespread adoption of austerity measures against sovereign debt crises; hence the burden of this retreat of the state left ordinary citizens helpless against the economic pressures of corporate capitalism. The most important, singled out consequence of neoliberal globalization has been social inequality. In this context, redistribution mechanisms become instrumental in reversing inequality and lifting the heavy burden off the shoulders of ordinary citizens. Similar to reorganization of production, redistribution needs to organize on a non-state, non-market basis and requires the direct involvement of the beneficiaries. When integrating redistribution with production, one way to counter inequality is by way of controlling the income gap. Piketty discusses the “rise of the super salaries”, the stars of the corporate world, in order to expose the expansion of the income gap (Piketty 2014). For this, a second principle is operational in redefining earnings on the basis of work investment rather than capital

investment. Third, the local level of organization provides an opportunity for the producers and the consumers to meet directly, where needs are met from the immediate sources. Although the locally available produce will not be sufficient to meet the diverse needs of households, there is ample local ground to counteract market dependency.

So far the two aspects discussed represent the material bases of solidarity economies. The linking of production and redistribution is a major challenge to the existing economic discourse, bringing the systemic abstractions of neoliberal economics back to the “social” basis where it belongs. However, there is also a need to revise the “social” in which these material bases are embedded. The framework for this research benefits from workplace democracy and a reorganization of labor solidarity as the social bases of solidarity economies.

Workplace democracy is conceptualized as an alternative domain of political organization and interest seeking in response to two major dynamics in the contemporary social organization. The first dynamic is the increasing questioning of liberal democracy in general and representative democracy in particular. The declining rates of political participation, the weakness of parliamentary democracies in providing a domain of pluralist interest seeking and the increasing inclination of the public towards what Beck calls subpolitics are some factors that trigger an alternative domain of politics (Beck 2009). The second dynamic is the transformation of social movements in a way to encompass both class based politics and identity politics. The binary opposition of old social movements based on class and the new social movements based predominantly on identity gave way to transnational social activism (Tarrow 2005), global social movements in general and global justice movement in particular (Della Porta 2005). In addition there has been a reflexive transformation in the labor movement towards community unionism or social movement unionism, in which the conventional strategies employed towards the achievement of standard labor demands such as

wages, benefits, paid sick leave and paid vacation time have further been diversified. Hence the boundaries between the household and the workplace have been blurred. This also reflects upon social organization, in which interests are not necessarily sought in sectarian structures but rather pushed by individuals who represent overlapping interests. How can an alternative domain of politics be constructed at the local level that would respond to these two dynamics and overcome the limitations of mainstream politics and global social movements?

There are several different conceptualizations on workplace democracy. Some of these focus on the legal framework and the organizational capacity (Markey, 2001: 4-5), some others focus on the issues undertaken in workplace democracy. There is also a procedural dimension as to how workplace democracy will function in terms of participation, decision making, power sharing and representation (Guest and Peccei, 2001: 221). Workplace democracy enables the incorporation of race, gender and other forms of stratification into the workplace agenda, further enriching the class-based demands of workers: “The superexploitation of people of color under capitalism is perhaps the best explanation for their greater support of economic democracy.” (Collom, 2001: 492). The critical intervention that this research is making is expanding the domain of workplace democracy to include community issues. The community level of social organization represents the social and material dispositions of workers that are closely linked to their workplace experience, their forms of employment and the economic returns of their employment. The current state of employment relations provide limited means for workers to organize their lives and social relations in sustained standards. High turnover rates, declining wages, the long standing trends of informalization and casualization are all workplace dynamics that directly play into how working class communities are organized. Therefore, the resolutions workers seek in the workplace are not only for their individual labor status but also for their families. Issues of the community are directly and consequentially linked to workplace dynamics.

Finally, solidarity economies propose a new form of labor solidarity. The period of neoliberal globalization witnessed a significant retreat in the labor movement, in the form of declining union density, the disintegration of collective bargaining systems, overall weakening of labor bargaining power. Part of this decline is due to the changing employment patterns, as the increasing social and sectoral diversity was not absorbed by the existing labor structures. But it was also due to the increasing competition in the global labor market, where capital's fast and extended mobility became a threat to employment rates and sustained employment, especially in less developed countries. A third challenge has been the growth of global social movements and the ability of transnational activism to mobilize diverse interests from different social groups that would otherwise be either excluded or marginalized in the labor movement. Therefore the search for new labor solidarity aims to address these challenges in line with the framework of solidarity economies. This does not necessarily entail the complete overthrow and replacement of existing structures such as labor unions or labor parties; rather, it implies non-union forms of labor organization to become a core component of organization and struggle. Worker centers and other forms of civic associations are important examples of this transition. In addition to this organizational transition, the new labor solidarity is less political and more civil in its demands. The old-style struggles towards the acquisition of political power gave way to sub-state level struggles where the problems pertaining to the lives of the workers are sought to be resolved at the immediate level they occur in, hence skipping the cumbersome bureaucratic steps of state branches. The inefficiency of parliamentary democracy in terms of representation and the weak trickle-down effect of policy making were referred to in relation to workplace democracy. One final transformation that characterizes new labor solidarity is the use of unconventional forms of mobilization and collective action. As unions grow weaker, so does their collective action as strikes and worker protest. Instead, there are new mechanisms such as encampment, boycotts,

workers' forums and other forms of mobilization usually performed in alliance with other social movements. The relatively more structured labor movement is now going through radical transformations in organization, content, interests sought and strategies employed.

Solidarity Economies: A Countermovement in Making

Previous research on solidarity economies referred to a number of international cases that were representative of the principles of solidarity. Solidarity economies are defined to be non-state, non-market formations that aim to use locally available resources for the benefit of local communities. Therefore solidarity economies do not come in a single form and operate in a single economic area, they may be as diverse as the locally available resources are, they may be further diversified depending on the interest of local communities. This paper will focus on four diverse cases from Turkey that operate in different locales, produce different goods and services, and generate a variety of returns for their participants.

Rural Development through Cooperativism

Cooperatives are one of the most common and well structured examples of solidarity economies. They have been historically prevalent alternatives to the capitalist enterprise and earlier discussions of cooperativism can be traced as early as nineteenth century (Owen 1991) Cooperatives vary by size, function and organization. However, principles of participatory and democratic decision making,

Tire-Süt was established in 1967 as part of government's rural development approach. Therefore, the initial establishment was the result of a top-down approach in response to a different political and economic milieu. The transition of the Turkish economy from an import substitute industrialization model to that of export oriented opening up led to a declining interest in both rural development and the cooperative model. However, there has been a gradual but firm transformation in rural areas towards a collective economic approach. The cooperative gained momentum since 2002 and currently has 2000 dairy farmers as

shareholders and employs 150 administrative and technical personnel. The initial aim of the cooperative was to protect the local producers against corporate competition by facilitating low cost, high quality production of dairy produce. There has been an expansion towards meat products, yet the diversity of their produce is not as high as a corporate model. In terms of marketing, the cooperative has become a trademark; the products are sold in the metropolitan area of Izmir, the third biggest city in the country with a population of four million. The cooperative participates in social projects together with the local government and distributes milk to elementary school kids. Therefore local alliances help sustain demand for a local cooperative brand. As for economic returns, the cooperative model provides sustained income to farmers, also supports the farmers with additional services such as counseling and training, providing machinery, forage, and fuel for the farmers in Exchange for their produce. The success of the cooperative draws international attention as the cooperative won the UN FAO award for rural development.

Overcoming the Gender Gap: Women's Cooperatives

There are numerous aspects of the gender gap in the economy: gendered division of labor, gender wage gap, the glass ceiling, and low rates of labor force participation among women, especially in the less developed parts of the world. The situation has further deteriorated since the onset of globalization with the widespread feminization of the global labor force and informal and flexible employment of women. Women in Turkey are marginalized in the labor market due to low rates of labor force participation and employment in the secondary labor market. The impact of conservative politics in general and political Islam in particular further exacerbates the negative consequences. For all those excluded and marginalized, women's cooperatives provide an outlet to those who have limited assets to work or to start up a business. Women's cooperatives operate on a local basis, based on the home-based production of arts and crafts, textiles and various food products. Networking over the internet

enables them to get in touch with other producers as well as with buyers, in some cases giving them an opportunity to make wholesale deals.

Women's cooperatives in Turkey are organized into a network of cooperatives. They hold regular meetings and receive counseling and support from researchers and lawyers and other professionals. A tripartite structure stands out as a representative example among many. Foundation for the Support of Women's Work, as a civil society organization has initiated an online marketing site, Nahil, where women post their produce and connect with buyers. In addition, Maya is the first microcredit organization solely for women who aim to start up their micro businesses. Maya has been in operation since 1999 and has benefited more than 12.000 women. Credits are given to groups of three to five women, for a maximum of \$300, to be paid back in weekly amounts in one year. These are mostly used by home-based working women who produce either goods or services to be consumed locally.

The model is a local adaptation of the worldwide known examples of HomeNet International or SEWA. The priority given to women's solidarity is central in addressing the marginalization and exclusion of women from the labor market in general and primary labor market in particular.

Power to the Workers: Kazova Factory Takeover

So far the two examples have been highly structured and relatively institutionalized, with specific target groups and economic activities undertaken, with an established agenda and regulated practice. There are also examples that are less structured yet representing alternative solidarities. The Kazova Textile factory closed down in January 2013, leaving 94 workers unemployed, with unpaid wages for the last four months, only part of the factory machinery left behind in inoperable state. Workers showed resistance and began encampment which continued until May 1st, during which workers faced brutal treatment by the police.

As the clash continued and factory owners were nowhere to be found, eleven workers occupied the factory in June 2013. Workers were able to operate and produce sweaters by September 2013, through increasing awareness, public support and other campaigns.

Factory takeovers are common forms of labor resistance throughout the world, including France, Argentina and crisis-ridden Greece. Although it is a relatively unstructured form of mobilization and has an illegal dimension to it, in many cases workers are able to form a sustained solidarity with the motivation of collective resistance. The good side of Kazova resistance is that it has become an established entity for the last three years and sustains its production, with the support and alliance of other resistance movements. The downside of this experience is that the Kazova resistance was divided into two separate movements, due to disagreements among workers, as Kazova Resistance and Free Kazova.

Solidarity with the Immigrants: Kapilar

The inability of governments in managing the current refugee crisis generated a number of formal and informal migration networks to address the problems that refugees encounter along their migration routes. These migration networks connect a number of nodes along migration routes. Turkey has received the highest number of refugees from Syria at three million so far, and 70.000 of these reside in Izmir, waiting to pass to Greek islands via legal or illegal routes. Kapilar, an informal solidarity network located in the neighborhood of Kapilar where refugees live, operates as an agent that helps refugees with various needs. In addition to providing food, shelter and basic needs, they also help refugees connect with other state and civil society agents, access bureaucratic channels, receive health care and legal counseling. Most important resource for its activities is charity and volunteer work. Different from the previous examples, Kapilar has less economic basis than solidaristic ones. Students, academics, local shop keepers, international students and scholars all volunteer for various

durations and contribute to daily activities. Privacy and confidentiality is one of the more important issues as most of the refugees lack formal status.

Conclusion

This paper uses three separate but interrelated levels of analysis to expose the diverse experiences of solidarity economies and their counter-systemic implications. At the lowest level of inquiry the research empirically analyzes four different cases, each of which undertake the tasks of production and redistribution and make use of alternative practices of democratic arbitration and labor solidarity. The four cases are diverse in terms of their constituents, their social base and economic field of activity. They employ different strategies and pursue relatively diversified interests. However, all four cases are similar in the way they operate outside of the realm of the state and the capitalist market and/or corporate structures. They are all locally organized and depend on direct participation of constituents not only in the production scheme but also in the administration of the organization –despite the fact that organization may be relatively informal and/or unstructured-. The constituents of each case are either excluded from or marginalized in the dominant structures of neoliberal globalization.

At a higher level of abstraction, the four cases under focus represent the definitive features of solidarity economies. Mainly, they emerge as non-state, non-market domain for the excluded and marginalized parties to become economically actively and politically mobilized. The level of economic activity or its material returns are not compatible with those of the capitalist market; they are more socially grounded than profit oriented. Although some cases have the potential of transforming into corporate bodies, none have the financial or resource basis to compete in the global market. In a similar fashion the political mobilization in these and other similar cases is more local and geared towards the resolution of immediate issues.

There is great emphasis on direct participation in multiple processes and any possibility of expansion in these structures is inclined towards a horizontal one than a vertical one.

Finally, the last level of abstraction aims to interpose the discussion of solidarity economies into a Polanyian framework. By definition, solidarity economies are embedded in a set of social relations that prioritize solidarity over utility maximization or economic efficiency. Solidarity is both an end in itself and a means to an end that facilitates alternative relations of production and challenges the existing mechanisms of redistribution. From a different point of view, solidarity economies provide an alternative venue to the Polanyi problem, or the double movement. The inequalities generated by the free market mechanism leads to a response from the society to reverse the detrimental impact of the self-regulating market. This research makes a critical intervention by conceptualizing solidarity economies as the emerging countermovement against the current phase of the self-regulating market, namely neoliberal globalization. The countermovement of solidarity economies may be yet unstructured and sporadic in occurrence. They may also be regarded with suspicion given their diverse nature, small scale and limited potential in replacing the domain of the capitalist market; yet they also prove to be of noteworthy potential in their social base.

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