

Developments

Book Review- David Hanley's BEYOND THE NATION STATE: PARTIES IN THE ERA OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION (2008)

By Dumoluhle Siziba*

[David Hanley, *BEYOND THE NATION STATE: PARTIES IN THE ERA OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION*, LONDON: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN 2008; ISBN: 978-1-4039-0795-0; 256 pp., \$ 89.95]

The globalization phenomenon has not only affected the manner in which nation states deal with each other in the international arena but has seen to the increase in international cooperation between civil society groups from different countries.¹ Added to the mix, has been the growing role and importance of transnational (political) parties [TNP] in providing legitimacy and an arena for dialogue and cooperation for its constituent national parties. David Hanley's *Beyond the Nation State: Parties in the Era of European Integration* [*Beyond the Nation State*] examines the whole phenomenon of party transnationalism in historical and theoretical terms.²

The fundamental aim of this book review is to critically examine Hanley's book by comparing it to previous scholarship on the TNP to determine what the book adds to the ongoing debate. Part A of the review shall summarize Hanley's positions as articulated in his book and Part B shall compare it to previous scholarship.

A. *Beyond the Nation State*- A Brief Synopsis

Hanley engages in a substantive study that examines and traces the history of the transnational cooperation between different national parties. The book relies, to a considerable extent, on interviews with key protagonists (some of these from transnational parties) but pays particular attention to key officials from a number of national parties, drawn from a range of states. The protagonists come from every main party family.

* B.A, J.D. Candidate 2009 & Senior Student Editor, German Law Journal (Osgoode Hall Law School, York University, Toronto). Email: dumosiz@hotmail.com [Many thanks to Maureen Rezkalla for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this review]

¹ David Held, *A Globalizing World?* CULTURE, ECONOMICS, POLITICS 128 (2004)

² DAVID HANLEY, *BEYOND THE NATION STATE: PARTIES IN THE ERA OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION* 5 (2008).

Firstly, Hanley does not purport to explain the transnational activity of national political parties; the phenomenon appears to be undergoing a significant evolution despite the long histories of most party families. As a result, the reality of today's TNP is not well known. The evolution of the TNP, according to the author, is not finished despite the relative period of stagnation for the EU as a whole. Several resolutions could be passed (i.e. one sponsored by Jo Lienen MEP that was recently voted by the European Parliament could receive follow up from Council and Commission). In this fluid situation, the author argues that it is necessary to open the lines of enquiry rather than lay a binding hypothesis.³

Hanley begins by opting to use the term transnationalism over internationalism because the latter term is often used to refer to US hegemony. Transnationalism, as used by Hanley, refers to the creation of and participation in supranational party structures by national based parties of similar persuasion.⁴ In Chapter 1, Hanley examines the history of political parties and contends that they rose out of a famous cleavage, moments of high tension within European societies, as they began to modernize economically and politically. They represented the social interests of groups polarized on either side of these cleavages.⁵ One such cleavage is the socio-economic or class cleavage that pits the property-owners against the workers. Parties were developed to protect the various demographics. Ultimately, the author contends that political parties are organizations that are pre-occupied with self-preservation and attaining/maintaining power.

Hanley contends that a better approach to understanding political parties is to focus on them as living organisms with their own needs; the most important of which is attaining office. Contrary to arguments that national parties should be wary of joining the TNP as they risk losing their autonomy, Hanley argues that there is no reason for them to fear cooperating with other parties on a transnational level if this will advance their goals. The author suggests that one theory that potentially addresses the phenomenon of the TNP is that of Principal and Agent. In particular, the TNP are essentially agencies created by a partnership of national parties of broadly similar outlook hence their development can be limited by the national parties. In creating the agent, the principal will delegate powers to the agency and put in place certain compliance measures to curtail the power of the TNP and preserve the parties' autonomy.⁶

Chapter 2 of the book examines the evolution of transnational activity by focusing on its origins through the creation of the European Community to the present situation with its

³ *Id.*, at 6.

⁴ *Id.*, at 5.

⁵ *Id.*, at 11.

⁶ *Id.*, at 6.

developing TNP. The author notes that the First International or the International Working Men's Association (1867-1876) was a response to developments within the nation states of Europe which were trying to establish a political identity, while at the same time industrializing.⁷ The organization fell apart because of internal tensions between the anarchists' wings and the centralists. Hanley notes that the life of the First international identified possible common work across national boundaries and also revealed problems involved in meeting them. The evolution from Internationals to TNP might never have progressed any further but for the shocks of the Second World War. In the short term, the war destroyed internationals but reconstruction brought new opportunities. The party families did not take long to rediscover international links after 1945 (i.e. the Socialist International). Henceforth, transnationalism was to be increasingly understood as part of the process that has come to be known as Europeanization.⁸ Hanley also notes that the subsequent TNP have benefited from the experiences of the First International.

Hanley notes that most national parties in Europe have dual membership in both TNP and Internationals. In understanding the difference between the two it is necessary to appreciate that Internationals originally provided the matrix in which the TNP were established. Internationals cover the world, whilst in this case, the TNP cover Europe.⁹ Hanley contends that any enquiry into the transnational cooperation soon runs up against the presence of political foundations. TNP foundations can help parties raise finances and also provide a think tank or programmatic resources. Even more importantly, foundations are the key locus in the identification of selection of possible partners for the TNP. Hanley notes that there are different levels of transnationalism. He notes that, at present, the TNP or European party has been the sight of the most significant locus of party activity beyond their frontiers. By focusing on such parties, Hanley contends that this will provide the best measure of what national parties are really doing when they sign up to transnational structures.

On the basis of this analysis, Hanley then engages in an examination of the major party families (chapters 3-8) with a view of seeing how far they fit into or diverge from the general model of the TNP. In Chapter 3, Hanley argues that the socialist parties have no easy answer to the dilemmas of globalization. There seems to be little agreement among them as to how the TNP might be best used in this context. The disagreement amongst the members of this TNP is centered on the question of how much autonomy the national parties should concede to the transnational vehicle.¹⁰ In Chapter 4, Hanley contends that the Christian Democrats (EPP) would like to see itself as an integrated party further down

⁷ *Id.*, at 31.

⁸ *Id.*, at 40-41.

⁹ *Id.*, at 50-51.

¹⁰ *Id.*, at 82-83.

the road. The party still falls short of fully integrated status although the closely supervised agent is slightly more robust than that of some other families.¹¹ Concerning Liberals and Democrats, Hanley notes in Chapter 5 that they remain in third place within the ranks of transnational forces despite the lack of ambiguity of their position. Hanley suggests that this development can be explained by the traumas of the transition in Eastern and Central Europe that left unfavourable circumstances for the emergence of organized liberalism.¹²

In Chapter 6 Hanley examines the Communists and Allies. He notes that the memories of the top-down approach of the Comintern and its damaging consequences for national parties has left a deep mark in the left parties' psyche, one that has affected their ability to organize nationally and transnationally.¹³ Hanley examines the Regionalists family and the Greens in Chapter 7 and notes that the transnational experiences of both families have been very similar. The regionalists have found transnationalism beset with pitfalls and because of their local focus, they have difficulty in gaining wider polity of which they form part. On the other hand, the Greens came early to transnationalism. It could be argued that their development has always run parallel to the forging of transnational links.¹⁴ Finally, Hanley examines the Sovereignists, Sceptics and Populists in Chapter 9. He contends that the Sovereignists (or Soft Sceptics) have acquired a structure that seems viable. This model postulates their demise and the unification of Sceptics of all shades into one group or TNP. He also notes that the hard Sceptics seem to prefer minimal TNP, which they see mainly as sources for propaganda campaign.¹⁵ Hanley concludes his book, by bringing together his findings in a comparative, cross family analysis, before evaluating the usefulness of this type of research for the study of comparative party politics in general.

B. *Beyond the Nation States- A critical Analysis*

As noted above, Hanley contends that the TNP are essentially agencies created by partnerships of national parties that delegate powers to the TNP and also retain some control by creating certain control mechanisms. Hanley suggests that the phenomenon of the TNP can be understood by examining the 'Principal and Agency' theory. In this premise, that guides Hanley's approach to the book, the TNP acts as the agent whilst the national parties are the principals in the relationship. Hanley also contends that national parties are self-preserving organizations that are interested in obtaining power hence they participate

¹¹ *Id.*, at 114.

¹² *Id.*, at 134.

¹³ *Id.*, at 152.

¹⁴ *Id.*, at 157-158, 168.

¹⁵ *Id.*, at 199.

in the TNP because this does not undermine their goals. The Principal and Agency approach adopted by Hanley enables him to efficiently grasp and examine a troublesome subject but on closer inspection proves problematic.

The classical understanding of the Principal and Agency theory implies that the principal is able to preserve certain autonomy whilst the agent remains subordinate to the former. This theory cannot be perfectly attributed to the TNP because the Principal is not a single actor but is a composition of various national parties of the same persuasion. Compounding on this problem is the fact that decisions in the TNP are made by several national parties which potentially means that a political party may be bound by the TNP decision(s) that it does not agree with because it belonged to a minority-voting block. Although it could be argued that the national party in question could exit from the TNP; this argument is not always feasible, especially in cases where the advantages of continuing the relationship (networking, tactical support, financing etc) outweigh those of leaving.

To his credit, Hanley does examine a situation where the national parties (Principal) became the controlled agencies of the TNP. In Chapter 6, Hanley argues that the history of the Comintern has been an anomaly in the development of the TNP. The Comintern was composed of leftist parties that were predicated on the Soviet model; that is, they were designed as a new type of political instrument aimed at prosecuting a revolution.¹⁶ Hanley notes that the other TNP have learnt from the shortcomings of the Comintern and have avoided a top-down delegation by the TNP to the national parties in order to preserve the autonomy of the former. However, this does not undermine the fact that the TNP, to a certain extent, are still capable of altering the Principal and Agency theory, such that the national parties become constrained by the former. Indeed, it has been noted that 'the transnational organizations to which national parties belong are not just arenas. They are already actors in their own right with authority to shape agendas'.¹⁷ Party groups inside the European Parliament are important actors in the EU decision-making process, and the evidence indicates that they can be considered cohesive actors, with internal organization, facilitated by ideological homogeneity, providing the key for their cohesion.¹⁸

On a different note, Hanley's book succeeds in advancing the debate on the TNP by providing a comprehensive analysis of previous scholarship on the subject. One leading publication in this field was Tapio Raunio's *The European Perspective: Transnational Party*

¹⁶ *Id.*, at 139.

¹⁷ Karl Magnus Johansson, *The Transnationalization of Party Politics*, in *Transnational Parties in the European Union*, 45 (Bell David & Lord Christopher eds., 1998)

¹⁸ Tapio Raunio, *The European Perspective: Transnational Party Groups in the 1989-1994 European Parliament* 189 (1997).

Groups in the 1989-1994 European Parliament, published in 1997. Raunio's book increased the understanding of the European Parliament (EP) by analyzing the behaviour of the EP party groups in a data rich fashion. Raunio contends that the most important arena for transnational party co-operation is the European Parliament, and more importantly for our purposes, the fate of the TNP is tied to progress in European integration.¹⁹ Hanley seems to agree with this notion by noting that the evolution of the TNP is by no means finished, even with the current stagnation in the European Union. Hanley, reasons that in this fluid situation, it seems important to open up a few lines of enquiry, rather than lay down binding hypotheses concerning the nature of the TNP. To this extent, the book succeeds in building on previous scholarship and providing a historical and a theoretical analysis of the TNP.

On reflection, I grudgingly accept the wisdom of Hanley's refusal to set binding hypothesis for the future development of the TNP and instead opting to open some lines of enquiry to understand the process. The logic behind this is that one cannot foretell future events that will shape the nature of the TNP. Taken to the extreme, it could be argued that Hanley's stance stands for the proposition that it is wiser to refrain from making academic predictions about future events especially in this case where the evolution of the TNP is not even complete. The fallacy behind this reasoning is the assumption that the evolution of the TNP will some day be complete and academics will be in a sound position to analyze the nature of these organizations.

Hanley suggests at the onset of his book that political parties should be understood as living organisms with needs (i.e. attaining political power). At the risk of stating the obvious; living organisms are forever evolving because of the constantly changing environment that they exist in and their particular needs at any point and time. Under Hanley's Principal and Agency theory, it follows that if the principal is a living entity, the agency (TNP) must also be a living organism by virtue of its relationship to the principal. To balance these two factors- the need to examine and set some sort of hypothesis for understanding the TNP and the fluid nature of these organizations- it is necessary to carefully examine the environment that they exist in today.

On this cautionary note, I believe that the future of the TNP is somewhat dim. This is due to the globalization phenomenon that has seen to the increase of civil society organizations including nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) that share the same objectives as the TNP and have standing before various EU organs.²⁰ As more transnational grassroots organizations emerge it is likely that the national parties will begin to rethink

¹⁹ *Id.*, at 192.

²⁰ EurActiv, *Brussels urged to take 'closer look' at NGOs*, 17 September 2008, available at: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/pa/brussels-urged-take-closer-look-ngos/article-175456>, last accessed 23 February 2009

the nature of their relationships with the TNP and it is possible that membership in these organizations will decrease.