

„Social Movements in Global Perspectives: Past, Present and Future“ Summer School

Veranstalter: Stefan Berger / Sabrina Zajak, Institute for Social Movements, Ruhr-University Bochum

Datum, Ort: 01.09.2014–12.09.2014, Bochum

Bericht von: Eva Gondorová, Institute for Social Movements, Ruhr-University Bochum / Ulf Teichmann, Ruhr-University Bochum

The interdisciplinary and international conference, which was at the heart of the Summer School „Social Movements in Global Perspectives“, addressed the basic concepts and the history of social movements as well as contemporary social movements from a sociological perspective while taking political and economic aspects into consideration. The overall framework was shaped by thirty-seven national and international guest lecturers who delivered keynotes, gave presentations and discussed the current state of research as well as challenges of social movement research with participating students. Focusing on four overarching issues which were dominant throughout the conference, the report presents selected talks, which reflected on these issues.

The central and continuously emerging issue of the conference was the tension between the aspirations towards a global approach to social movements and the status quo of research dominated by Western European and North American scholars.

LUDGER PRIES (Bochum) opened the conference with a plea against „methodological nationalism“, which takes for granted the nation state as the unit of analysis, as well as against „methodological globalism“, which takes the whole globe as a natural unit of analysis. He called for a „methodological transnationalism“ that takes local, national, transnational, supranational and global entanglements of social phenomena into account. Therein he stated ambitions which not every talk was able to fulfil during the conference. Among other reasons, this was caused by a predominantly Western focus in most of the presentations. Even though a considerable number of guest lecturers included

a transnational comparison in their presentations, the focus of the conference lay predominantly on Western countries, in some cases only on Western Europe. Movements in the Global South were sometimes presented as only an appendix of their Western ‘role models.’ STEFAN BERGER (Bochum) portrayed social democratic labour movements in the same fashion but at the same time, he problematised this approach. Quoting Dipesh Chakrabarty’s notion, that Europe is „indispensable and inadequate“¹, he inquired as to whether it is possible at all to write the history of labour movements without starting in Europe, even if the notation of labour movements as „European export articles“ may be inadequate in some cases.

The difficulty in overcoming the Western perspective as a starting point of reference may have been connected to the fact that we are used to differentiating movements by means of concepts that are deeply rooted in Western or European thoughts. For example, FRANK UEKÖTTER (Birmingham) underlined that environmentalism is a predominantly Western concept in order to justify his focus on Western countries. Environmental conflicts in the Global South, he stated, have another character because of their firm linkage to social and economic issues. Furthermore, THOMAS LEKAN (Columbia, SC) re-framed the 1970s environmentalists’ cry of „think globally, act locally“ and questioned how locally situated actors – usually white male scientists from Western Europe and the United States – arrogate for themselves the task of „speaking for the earth“.

A sensitive scepticism towards the Western bias was presented by scholars with a research focus outside of Anglo-Saxon and Western European countries. Focusing on the cases of sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab world KATHLEEN FALLON (New York) and NORA LAFI (Berlin) claimed that social protests in these regions, while not being considered as homogenous, have their own long history that cannot be conceived adequately from a Western perspective. Both scholars stressed that these regions have a

¹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton 2000, p. 16.

long tradition of existing networks of mobilisation, which was demonstrated by Kathleen Fallon through the example of 'the women's war' in Nigeria in 1929 and 'the Harry Thuku protests' in Kenya in 1922. Furthermore, Nora Lafi emphasised that „present social movements in the Arab world are in no way just exports of Western thinking, democracy or human rights“ and asserted that the lasting culturalist clichés in approaches to the Arab world must be overcome.

As studies on social movements mostly focus on protests in democratic societies, some presentations brought to mind that protests in authoritarian states face different political opportunity structures. Analysing mobilisations for workers' rights in China, CHRIS KING-CHI CHAN (Hong Kong) showed how workers' protests emerge in an authoritarian state, and are exposed to other forms of counteraction since juridical persecution and bargaining negotiations are organised in a different way. Additionally, KUNTALA LAHIRI-DUTT (Canberra) explored how missing political opportunity structures can hamper the emergence of social movements, even in a state that is nominally considered a democracy. She underlined that social movement theory based on Western concepts is not able to capture the way peasants in India, who lack access to diverse resources, protest against land grabbing.

Another contested concept throughout the conference was the widespread distinction between 'old' and 'new' social movements. The presentations of Stefan Berger, GERASSIMOS MOSCHONAS (Athens), and KEVIN MORGAN (Manchester) highlighted the emergence of labour movements out of conflicts in the social structure and acknowledged the close affiliation of labour movements with the political party as an organisational principle. These characteristics are considered a central distinction of 'old' from 'new' social movements. The rigid dichotomy between 'old' and 'new' social movements was questioned by Kevin Morgan. He contested Claus Offe's assertion that new social movements reject „the organisational principle of differentiation, whether in the horizontal (insider vs. outsider) or in the vertical dimension (leaders vs. rank and file members)“². Con-

trary to this statement, Morgan argued that biographical approaches confirmed both horizontal and vertical differentiation of communist parties. He further claimed that communists have a strong 'insider' collective identity yet, at the same time they are internally differentiated based on organisational hierarchy, cultural capital, social class, personal opportunity and status.

Referring to recent workers' protests in Greece, MARKOS VOGIATZOGLU (Florence) pointed out that the whole „social movement environment“ influences trade union's activities and therefore the differentiation between 'old' and 'new' movements is no longer valid in the Greek case. He underpinned his argument by giving the example of „precarious workers unions“, which are direct-democratic organisations of grassroots-entities.

Furthermore, HOLGER NEHRING (Sheffield) and Frank Uekötter raised crucial doubts about the differentiation between 'old' and 'new' social movements. In regards to peace and environmental movements, they highlighted the importance of the historical context of social movements and underscored the significance of continuities, which are neglected by the theory of 'new' social movements. Moreover, HÅKAN THÖRN (Gothenburg) doubted the validity of the theory of 'new' social movements emphasising that their roots did not always lay in the post-industrial society but were deeply rooted in anticolonial struggles in the Global South. As an outcome of the conference, it became clear that the differentiation between 'old' and 'new' social movements cannot be applied without sufficient reflection on its emergence out of the actual linkage of social movement scholarship and activism in 'new' social movements.

The acceleration of globalisation since the 1970s coincided with a new wave of social movements at least in the Western world and led to increased cooperation between social movements across borders. For example, the 1970s saw the rise in popularity of human rights movements, especially in Western Eu-

² Claus Offe, *New social movements: Challenging the boundaries of institutional politics*, in: *Social Research* 52:4 (1985), pp. 817-868, here p. 829.

rope and the Anglo-Saxon countries. JAN ECKEL (Freiburg) linked this development to the process of globalisation and identified „ethics of interdependence“ which made a global, but mainly Western, community feel responsible to support human rights in other countries, which lacked basic rights such as the freedom of speech.

Furthermore, the globalisation of economy has undoubtedly influenced developments of social movements. Whereas social movements in the 20th century mainly targeted the state with their demands, more and more social movement actors aim to influence economic actors such as firms. This was explicitly portrayed by FRANK DE BAKKER (Amsterdam) who analysed how activist groups try to bring an institutional change to the economic field, urging firms to comply with their corporate social responsibility claims. The importance of inclusion of a political economy perspective in the analysis of social movements on a global level was underscored by SABRINA ZAJAK (Bochum). She asserted that the political economic view brought advantages to the study of social movements such as seeing the connection between movements, understanding the interplay of global and local levels in movements, and identifying and explaining new forms of transnational activism. Furthermore, PETER WATERMAN (Dublin/Lima) asked to what extent the international trade union movement responded to the challenges of neoliberal globalisation. He asserted that it was defensive and in retreat, for example by compromising over rights, wage levels and work safety standards.

Finally, Thomas Lekan scrutinised how the emblematic power of the image of the globe as a symbol of globalisation influenced environmental movements. He outlined the history of the ‘blue planet’ as an icon of environmental movements since it was first photographed from the universe in 1968 until the creation of Google Earth. Lekan asserted that this icon drew its power from the ability to make national interests, famines and other factors with negative connotations invisible.

The importance of taking the diffusion of social movements’ tactics into consideration was put forward by GRAEME HAYES (Birmingham) who argued that it enables us to de-

tect how tactics are interpreted, negotiated and transformed. He further underlined that political opportunity structures, as well as the cultural mapping of movement tactics, have a crucial influence on the process of diffusion. Through the example of mobilisations against genetically modified crops, he showed how activist groups in Belgium and Great Britain adopted an action form derived from the French group, but reframed it due to varying police tactics, criminal persecution and ‘group culture.’ Based on these findings he emphasised that even seemingly identical actions may not be the same actions in other contexts.

In the panel on peace movements, JARED DONNELLY (College Station, TX) and SEAN SCALMER (Melbourne) focused on the transcontinental diffusion of civil disobedience and Gandhi’s Satyagraha. Portraying how civil disobedience and direct action was implemented in the West German peace movement in the 1960s, Donnelly raised doubts about the concepts considering diffusion as a linear process. He explained that the tactic’s diffusion from Gandhi’s Salt Satyagraha to a sit-in in front of army barracks in Dortmund was a nonlinear process full of twists and turns that was driven by key individuals in the movement. Scalmer further explored the diffusion of Gandhi’s concept of Satyagraha as the way of nonviolence and explained why it took several decades for this concept to be adopted in the Western world. According to Scalmer, the influence of cultural misunderstandings as well as institutional and contextual barriers in the world threatened by organised violence between the 1930s and the 1940s, were the main reasons for the slow diffusion of nonviolent protest.

Asking if and how the characteristics of the ‘global 1968 movement’ reached its periphery in Bochum, ULF TEICHMANN (Bochum) asserted that the perspective on processes of transnational diffusion has to be widened. Arguing that the global level of social movements encompasses more than the connection between international movement centres, his presentation was a plea for taking local and regional, as well as transnational levels of social movements into account, even if a global framework is intended.

The ten day conference drew a line from the 19th century to a possible future of social movements and led to further reflections on how research on social movements can contribute to our understanding of societies. The conference presented the status quo of social movement research and additionally revealed its blind spots, such as the Western bias. It also indicated desiderata to strengthen an interdisciplinary approach in research in order to fully assess temporal and spatial scopes of social movements.

Conference Overview:

Panel 1: Globalisation of Economy, Global Work Processes and Social Movements

Ludger Pries (Bochum), Internationalisation of Companies and Possibilities of Cross-Border Employee Representation (Keynote)

Bengt Larsson (Gothenburg), Conditions for and Obstacles to Trade Union

Sarah Bormann (Berlin), Building Union Power through Transnational Campaigns

Graeme Hayes (Birmingham), Understanding Tactical Dilemmas in Context: A Comparison of Direct Action against Genetically Modified Crops in Belgium, France and the UK

Panel 2: Labour Parties and Distribution of Social Wealth

Gerassimos Moschonas (Athens), The Labour Parties' Transformation: A Historical and Comparative Approach (Keynote)

Stefan Berger (Bochum), Social-Democratic Labour Movements

Kevin Morgan (Manchester), Revolutionary Labour Movements

Traugott Jähnichen (Bochum), Protestantism and Trade Union Movement in the 20th Century

Panel 3: Social Conflicts over the Right to Land

Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt (Canberra), Understanding Resistance and Social Movements in Mining (Keynote)

Enrico Dal Lago (Galway), Emancipation from Slavery and Serfdom, and Land Rights:

The Americas and Eastern Europe Compared
Liviu Măntescu (Berlin), Environmental Activism and Green Grabbing

Panel 4: Social Movements, Capitalism and Markets

Sabrina Zajak (Bochum), A Political Economic Perspective on Social Movements (Keynote)

Frank de Bakker (Amsterdam), How Activist Groups Try to Impact Firms on Issues of Corporate Social Responsibility

Anannya Bhattacharjee (New Delhi), Global Supply Chain Bargaining and Campaigning

Peter Waterman (Dublin/Lima), The International Union Movement in the Globalized and Informatized Cage of Capitalism and Bureaucracy

Panel 5: Women's Movements/ 1968 and Social Movements

Ilse Lenz (Bochum), Women's Movements in Global Perspectives (Keynote)

Kathleen Fallon (New York), Women's Movements in sub-Saharan Africa

Marica Tolomelli (Bologna), Serve the Workers! How Italian and German Students Developed into Political Militants Devoted to Workers Struggles after 1968 (Keynote)

Ulf Teichmann (Bochum), 1968 in Bochum: The Ruhr-University as a Part of a Global Social Movement?

Panel 6: Peace Movements

Holger Nehring (Stirling) Peace Movements as Social Movements: Some Conceptual Thoughts (Keynote)

Sean Scalmer (Melbourne), The Global Gandhi

Jared Donnelly (College Station, TX), Transnational Diffusion of Protest Methods: Civil Disobedience and the West German Peace Movement

Stephen Milder (New Brunswick), Caught between Nuclear Freeze and Hot Autumn: The Complicated Relationship of the German and American Peace Movements, 1979 – 1983

Panel 7: Environmental Movements

Frank Uekötter (Birmingham), Befriending Leviathan: Environmentalism and the Decline of the Nation-State (Keynote)

Thomas Lekan (Columbia, SC), Thinking Locally, Acting Globally Global Environmentalism in the Age of Asymmetry

Carola Betzold (Gothenburg), Environmental Advocacy in the International Climate Change Negotiations

Matthias Dietz (Bremen), Survival Strategies of the Climate Movement

Panel 8: Democracy Movements and Human Rights Movements

Håkan Thörn (Gothenburg), Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Civil Society (Keynote)

Jan Eckel (Freiburg), Human Rights in Global Politics

Chris King-Chi Chan (Hong Kong), Workers' Rights and Human Rights in an Authoritarian State: Changing State and Society Relations in China

Nora Lafi (Berlin), The 'Arab Spring' in Global Perspective: Social Movements, Changing Contexts and Political Transition in the Arab World

Panel 9: Anti-Austerity Protests

Hans-Jörg Trenz (Copenhagen), The Euro Crisis: New Socio-Political Divisions, Mobility and Mobilization (Keynote)

Markos Vogiatzoglou (Florence), Workers' Mobilization in Greece: Protest and Social Movements in the Context of Austerity Politics

Moritz Sommer / Franziska Scholl (Berlin), Crisis Protests in the Eurozone: Insights from Discursive Actor Attribution Analysis

Alissa Starodub (Bochum), Participatory Action Research: Crisis Protest Forms in Spain, Germany and Greece

Panel 10: Witness Seminar: Social Movements in Action

Dieter Rucht (Berlin), Social Movements in

Action: Without Structures and Strategies?

Round-Table Discussion:

Yusuf Doğan Çetinkaya (Müşterekler/Başlangıç), Emma Ghariani, Wolfgang Schaumburg (Forum Arbeitswelten e.V.), Bettina Musiolek (Entwicklungspolitisches Netzwerk Sachsen e.V.), Victor Strazzeri, (Partido Socialismo e Liberdade/Comitê pela desmilitarização da polícia)

Students' Presentations

Final Podium Discussion

Tagungsbericht „Social Movements in Global Perspectives: Past, Present and Future“ Summer School. 01.09.2014–12.09.2014, Bochum, in: H-Soz-Kult 27.04.2015.