

The Centre for Kurdish Studies, University of Exeter
in collaboration with The Graduate Institute (Geneva) and the CERIC (Aix-en-Provence)

Call for Papers
International Doctoral Workshop
University of Exeter – 20 May 2014

Social Movements, Mobilization, and Political Protest in Non-democratic Contexts: An Interdisciplinary Perspective

The uprisings that erupted unexpectedly between 2010 and 2011 in the Middle East have propelled social movements and protestors to the forefront of the political and media scenes. Middle East scholars and experts agree that we are witnessing a re-politicisation of the Arab world, which stands in marked contrast to the increasing “depoliticisation” and apathy of recent years. Indeed, the “depoliticisation from above”, promoted by authoritarian or non-democratic states in the last decades had undermined traditionally dissenting milieus such as the university campuses and the “street” as sites of both political socialization and contestation. In particular, students and young graduates demonstrated once again that “depoliticisation from above” had its limits.

Hence, these uprisings and their outcomes should be seen as an opportunity to rethink a number of assumptions about political contestation and mobilization in the Middle East and, in general, in non-democratic contexts. Clearly, research must go beyond the conventional wisdom about societies in non-democratic countries, too often seen as determined by cultural and political “deficiencies”, and observe from a long-term perspective the local histories of dissent. Without such a retrospective outlook, it seems difficult to not fall into the “immaculate conception” trap. Taking into account the political context should also lead us to avoid rigid understandings and uses of concepts and categories which allowed for the development of Social Movement Theory (SMT) over the last 30 years such as Political Opportunity Structures, repertoires of contention, collective action frames, and cycles of contention. Despite McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly’s efforts to revise their own conceptual model, one must acknowledge that studying social and political mobilizations and contestations in

non-democratic countries –characterized by varying degrees of coercion, rare openings for mobilization as well as weak formal organizations– invites new perspectives to enrich SMT as an interdisciplinary enterprise.

Aims of the workshop

Although SMT encompasses numerous concepts and categories, we propose three main axis of reflection: political context, mobilization and demobilization; formation and use of repertoires of contention; militant and biographical trajectories. We encourage doctoral students drawing from different disciplines, to submit abstracts addressing one or more of the following questions:

What are the ambivalent effects of state coercion on social movements? Do they affect in the same way all protest movements? Is there a direct link between repression and demobilization? To what extent a more processual and dynamic approach to social movements and mobilization can help us to better grasp the interactions between political contexts, organizations, and activists? What are the limits of concepts such as “non-movements” or “everyday forms of resistance” to the study of social contestation in non-democratic contexts? Can we conceptually separate violent means from peaceful repertoires of action to analyze political mobilization? Is violence only a by-product of interactions, or a mean of action too, included in the repertoires of contention? What does the micro-level of analysis reveals about underground activism? What are the impacts of high-risk activism on individuals’ militant trajectories? Considering individual trajectories, is the distinction between private and public sphere still relevant in authoritarian contexts? What are the advantages of combining the three levels of analysis (macro, meso, and micro) in order to enrich and expand SMT?

Please send 250-words abstracts to Olivier Grojean (olivier.grojean@univ-amu.fr), Jordi Tejel (Jordi.Tejel@graduateinstitute.ch), and Clémence Scalbert-Yücel (C.Scalbert-Yucel@exeter.ac.uk), by 20 April 2014.

The language of the workshop will be English. Note that there is a limited budget for travel and accommodation. Please mention if you would need travel and accommodation costs covered by the organisation when you send your abstract.