

**Call for papers volume 9 issue 2 (November 2017)**  
**Social movement thinking beyond the core:**  
**theories and research in post-colonial and**  
**post-socialist societies**

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The November 2017 issue of the open-access, online, copyleft academic/activist journal *Interface: a Journal for and about Social Movements* (<http://www.interfacejournal.net/>) will focus on the theme of social movement studies beyond the “core” countries of north America and western Europe.

There will also be a special section on repression and social movement research, for which we are happy to publish contributions anonymously (and credit them when their authors feel it is safe to claim them). Contributions on other themes, as always, are also welcome.

**The academic study of social movements**

“Social movement studies”, as an academic entity with a (limited) degree of power, resources and legitimacy, clearly has its institutional roots in north America and western Europe, and the same is true for pretty much all the thinkers who are routinely cited in general “social movements” textbooks. Similarly, some of the most “powerful” (insofar as the term has any sense) theories used *within* social movements also have roots in these societies and are shaped by their specific historical experiences.

These specificities, however, are often not recognised or discussed, including in those contexts elsewhere in the world where academics or activists are importing such theories as ways of thinking about local (and global) realities.

Tomas MacSheoin’s (2016) article in *Interface* 8/1, and the article by Poulson, Caswell and Gray (2014) in *Social Movement Studies* 13/2 (see also the 2014 response by Graeme Hayes), have discussed the question of how far social movement studies, in their academic form, are a product or reflection of specifically northern / western approaches (primarily as opposed to those of the global South). Ágnes Gagyí (2015) has recently asked how adequate the subdiscipline is to post-socialist experiences (cf. Piotrowski 2015, Císař 2016).

Of course there are other histories of academic social movement studies. Several substantial schools of European writing which have not been translated into English have been rendered invisible by the growing global domination of English. Some of these, however, have a very fruitful relationship with Latin American scholarship, something which is true both for Spanish- and Portuguese-language scholarship but also, for example, for the work of Alain Touraine. There is of course a strong Latin American scholarship on social

movements in both languages, crossing national borders but rarely noticed in the Anglophone world and other contexts relying on English as an academic language. Conversely, the extensive Indian literature in English on social movements is rarely exported far beyond the country's borders.

Our own work has increasingly explored these questions: for example, Geoffrey has been organising discussions around this theme within the International Sociological Association's research committee 47 (Social Movements and Social Classes) and in his dialogues with researchers from the Global South (Bringel & Pleyers, 2015); Alf has been working on the question of sociologies of the global South in his research on India (Nilsen 2016); while Laurence has been working on understanding social movements in Ireland as a post-colonial society now increasingly located within the "West" (Cox 2016).

There are several dimensions to these questions, including

- the distinctive experiences of social movements and revolutions in different regions of the world
- the varied roles of academics and intellectuals in different societies
- the diverse kinds of relationships between academics and movements
- the complex trajectories of particular disciplines
- linguistic barriers

This discussion also raises the wider question of how far social science as currently conceived is specifically western in origin, structure and / or method. Scholars have increasingly been asking after the possibility of a "sociology of the global South": if so, is a "social movement studies of the global South" (Bringel & Dominguez, 2015) possible? How can we "think globally" (Wieviorka et al. 2015)? Or, with Sousa Santos (2006), should we rather be thinking in terms of "ecologies of knowledge" that connect different forms of movements' own theorising, different languages of communities in struggle and different kinds of emancipatory research?

### **Other forms of thinking about movements**

As this last point suggests, there are also *other* histories of thinking about what might be called social movements, both academic and activist, which are typically excluded in western scholars' accounts of the development of "social movement studies". Indeed it is a true indictment of the provincialism of this approach that it situates the origins of systematic thought on social movements within a particular lineage of US scholars – at times deigning to include an arbitrary handful of west European writers (Cox and Fominaya 2013) – as though writers in states whose very existence is the product of social movements and revolutions do not reflect on those experiences. Often these other reflections do not use the term, or only in a very general way and for external purposes. Of course there are also locally-specific forms of apparently

Northwestern thought which are radically different in practice from their originators, whether that fact is celebrated or obscured: Southern Marxisms and feminisms often bear little resemblance to dominant forms of these approaches in the global North, even when they seek academic legitimacy by citing Northern authorities.

But there are also both activist and academic traditions of thinking about movements which have fundamentally different histories. Articulating these is a way of challenging the intellectual power relations that automatically place Northwestern thought at the centre, and contributes to the creation of a genuinely global dialogue about social movement experiences and learning.

In much of the core, social movement studies are understood as relatively marginal to the central concerns of the social sciences. However in much of the postcolonial world in particular, intellectuals and academics have at times had particular concerns with social movements and revolutions – arguably in far deeper ways than in the West, given the impact of anti-colonial movements and the centrality of postcolonial movement struggles in many societies, but also in terms of expectations of intellectuals around social change. In postcolonial Ireland as in India, it is in history and literature that many of the key debates about popular struggles have taken place, and social movement studies' limited engagement with these fields is its own loss – a gap often made up by postcolonial theorising.

In movement thinking too, since the development of articulate forms of activist theory in then-colonial contexts, the anti-imperial and anti-capitalist revolutions which shook much of the twentieth century, and later waves of movements and revolutions against the newly-independent states (and those of Latin America, officially independent since the 19<sup>th</sup> century), Southern voices have become increasingly central to global dialogues. From the Ghadar movement (Ramnath 2011) and the Baku “Congress of the Peoples of the East” to the Zapatistas and the World Social Forum, movement thinking from beyond the core has increasingly set the agenda – and regularly had more to show for its efforts than many movements in the global North.

Actors, intellectuals, ideas, experiences and epistemologies from the South provide insights into their own reality, but also the challenges for democracy and possible emancipation paths in the Global North. We aim at developing research and analyses beyond borders and to fully include sociologists from all regions of the world.

## **The importance of dialogue**

All of these questions, of course, are central to *Interface's* original mission of supporting and encouraging dialogue between reflection on social movements from different parts of the world and the different languages (theoretical, political, disciplinary, intellectual, cultural) in which movements think about themselves and research is framed, something embodied in our unique

organisational structure. We are happy to see that MacSheoin's article shows that our approach bears some fruit, in terms of a wider global focus than other social movement journals – while recognising that there is still a huge way to go. If rough parity between articles on movements in core societies and those on movements in the global South probably mirrors to some extent the global distribution of academic researchers and resources, it does not in any way mirror the far greater strengths of *movement* theorists in the global South, and we need to find more effective ways of including these in our dialogue.

One key reason why *Interface* equally encourages dialogue between different intellectual and political traditions as well as between different disciplines is similarly the very different significance of these different ways of thinking in different national and regional contexts. This is of course also true for thinking *from and for* movements, which arguably plays out very differently in countries where empires have been overthrown within living memory, or for that matter those which are experiencing a reaction either against the socialist experience or against the hopes raised by the movements of 1989.

This special issue seeks to bring together contributions which articulate particular approaches to social movement research, movement-based theories and histories of thinking about these subjects which are rooted in the post-colonial and post-Soviet experiences, in the context and cultures of the global South or that in other ways decentre taken-for-granted assumptions and institutional power relationships about the production of social movement theory.

We are interested in everything from indigenous thought via religious forms of mobilisation to the particularities of movement theorising in China or in East and Central Europe. Intellectually we are open to discussions ranging from Indian subaltern studies, research on the Black Atlantic, Latin American feminisms to South African radical thought and more. We are interested in papers which challenge mainstream forms of social movement theory (whether resource mobilisation, political opportunity structure, new social movements, frame theory, dynamics of contention, strategy-framework etc.) from the perspective of movement experiences in the global South.

We are also interested in papers that highlight types of struggle which go beyond the themes of nationally- or core-defined politics. Thus work on anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggles, indigenous and peasant movements, mass-based left and ethnic movements, campaigns against free trade deals etc. are all very welcome.

We are particularly interested in theoretical discussions (eg around sociologies from the global South, Michel Wieviorka's *Penser global* project etc.) and social movement thinking processes (e.g. the World Social Forum discussion processes; Sen and Waterman 2008, Sen and Saini 2005) which reflect a consciously global aspiration based in the global South.

We are particularly interested in reflections on how far it might be possible to invite or include existing political and academic debates and discussions which are primarily focussed within a single country or region of the world into a wider debate, in *Interface* or elsewhere.

Finally we want to underline that this call does not require authors to subscribe to a particular analysis but instead invites conscious reflection on how far terms and distinctions like global South / global North, postcolonial, core / periphery etc. are helpful in understanding the movements they are studying.

### **Repression and research**

In a series of countries (not least Egypt, Turkey, Russia, India and Mexico), authors and journalists, academics and students involved in or working on social movements have come under sustained, at times lethal attack. This obviously forms part of wider assaults on movements, but at times it is clear that movement-linked thinking and writing are seen as a particular threat, or that the attempt is being made to remove movement voices from academia and publishing.

Authoritarian governments seem in some cases to be consciously testing the limits of what they can get away with, in an increasingly polycentric world and one where the thuggish celebration of violence often plays well with their own power bases. The key word here, though, is “testing”, and the question is whether they will get away with it: if they do in fact have a blank cheque for repression or if it is possible to push back, form alliances and effectively undermine their legitimacy.

We have been here before: disappearances and torture chambers, blacklists and institutional collaboration are nothing new, and nothing is served by presenting this situation in terms of simple despair, however theoretically sophisticated. As before, some of our own skills – clear analysis of what states are up to and why, whose tacit or active support is needed for repression, who our potential allies are and what international solidarity should focus on – may help, as may mobilising our own networks and using our own skills to highlight and discredit these strategies to the point where they are not worth pursuing (or better, where these governments follow earlier despotic regimes into oblivion).

Of course only some of this repressive wave directly targets movement intellectuals and academics, and large part of the response is best organised as solidarity with movements on the ground, or in the form of radical human rights campaigns appealing to a wider public opinion. But – together with other movement research networks who have highlighted this issue, such as the International Sociological Association’s RC47, mentioned above – we feel it is also incumbent on us as researchers and movement theorists to see what if anything we can offer specifically in these cases.

The new wave of attacks on movement intellectuals does not spare the core, as recent cases in countries like the US and Italy remind us, and of course the coercive waves that spread out from global programmes of surveillance, assassination by drone, containment of migrants in camps, campaigns against “extremism”, states of emergency, harassment of left academics and the like have their roots in core states. Nonetheless the greatest depths of repression – for now – have been experienced outside the core, and we hope to learn from activists and scholars there. In this context we are happy to publish anonymous contributions, which their authors can put their names to in later and happier years.

### **Questions for contributions to the themed section**

*Interface* is a journal of practitioner research, meaning that we welcome work by movement activists as well as activist scholars, and work in a variety of formats which suit these different kinds of writing as well as our very varied readership – which includes activists and researchers across the world, connected to many different movements and working within very different intellectual, theoretical and political traditions.

We are interested in pieces in many formats – peer-reviewed articles and interviews with movement activists, research and teaching notes, book reviews and key documents and other formats that work well for their purposes – that tackle some of the questions raised above.

All contributions should go to the appropriate regional editors by the deadline of May 1, 2017. Please see the editorial contacts page (<http://www.interfacejournal.net/submissions/editorial-contact/>) – and use the appropriate template. Please see the guidelines for contributors (<http://www.interfacejournal.net/submissions/guidelines-for-contributors/>) for more indications on content and style.

### **General contributions**

As always, this issue will also include non-theme related pieces. We are happy to consider submissions on any aspect of social movement research and practice that fit within the journal’s mission statement (<http://www.interfacejournal.net/who-we-are/mission-statement/>). Pieces for *Interface* should contribute to the journal’s mission as a tool to help our movements learn from each other’s struggles, by developing analyses from specific movement processes and experiences that can be translated into a form useful for other movements.

In this context, we welcome contributions by movement participants and academics who are developing movement-relevant theory and research. In addition to studies of contemporary experiences and practices, we encourage

analysis of historical social movements as a means of learning from the past and better understanding contemporary struggles.

Our goal is to include material that can be used in a range of ways by movements – in terms of its content, its language, its purpose and its form. We thus seek work in a range of different formats, such as conventional (refereed) articles, review essays, facilitated discussions and interviews, action notes, teaching notes, key documents and analysis, book reviews – and beyond. Both activist and academic peers review research contributions, and other material is sympathetically edited by peers. The editorial process generally is geared towards assisting authors to find ways of expressing their understanding, so that we all can be heard across geographical, social and political distances.

We can accept material in Afrikaans, Arabic, Catalan, Croatian, Danish, English, French, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Hungarian, Italian, Latvian, Maltese, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish and Zulu. Please see our editorial contacts page (<http://www.interfacejournal.net/submissions/editorial-contact/>) for details of who to send submissions to.

### **Deadline and contact details**

The deadline for initial submissions to this issue, to be published November 2017, is 1 May 2017. For details of how to submit pieces to *Interface*, please see the “Guidelines for contributors” on our website. All manuscripts should be sent to the appropriate regional editor, listed on our contacts page.

Submission templates are available online via the guidelines page (<http://www.interfacejournal.net/submissions/guidelines-for-contributors/>) and should be used to ensure correct formatting. *Interface* is a completely voluntary effort, without the resources of commercial journals, so we have to do all the layout and typesetting ourselves. The only way we can manage this is to ask authors to use these templates when preparing submissions. Thanks!

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