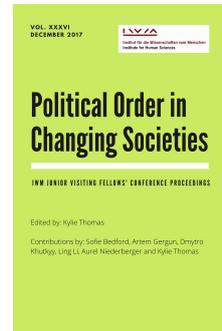


Political Order in Changing Societies

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The IWM Junior Fellows Conference, “Political Order in Changing Societies” took place on the 19th December 2017 at the IWM Library. The theme for this year’s conference sought to link the diverse work of the visiting fellows and to accentuate the common thread that runs through all our projects – that is, a desire to understand contemporary political and social life, not only in order to diagnose the present but to offer forms of critique that can shape the future. While the work of scholars may often seem distanced from the world of politics, the context of the IWM, which often provides a bridge between research and policy, makes it clear that these worlds are interconnected and that dialogue between them is critical. This conference took place under the shadow of the 2017 elections in Austria, the rise of the right across much of Europe, and the re-emergence of rhetoric within the public sphere that summoned the fear and hatred of the 1930s. While the papers presented at the conference do not address the Austrian context directly, the discussions held illuminated how insights from diverse contexts and from numerous disciplinary perspectives can shed light on ‘political order in changing societies’. The conference emphasized the importance of remaining open to, and aware of, transnational perspectives as a way to oppose nationalist parochialism.

The introduction to the conference was delivered by Ivan Vejvoda, IWM Permanent Fellow, and emphasised the importance of critical reflection in the current political moment. His opening remarks were followed by the first panel, “Voicing Protest: from Opposition to Resistance”. This panel was chaired by Artem Gergun and began with Sofie Bedford’s paper, “Clowns, Trouble Makers or Freedom Fighters? How to understand ‘Opposition’ in Authoritarian States”, which drew on her extensive research on political opposition in Belarus and Azerbaijan. Her study focuses on ‘opposition’ in harsh political climates that, not being able to achieve any concessions from the state, have come to be written off as ‘failed’ in much of the previous literature. Finding this approach unconstructive, Bedford’s project strives to, first, problematize what opposition in electoral authoritarian regimes is, as well as highlight the dynamism of opposition in these types of contexts. Second, building on its findings from the first task, her project

generates knowledge on how to build sustainable alternative political strategies in authoritarian states and, more specifically, to develop a toolbox for how to build ‘sustainable opposition’.

Zuzana Hudáková presented a paper that engaged with the research she conducted for her recently completed doctoral dissertation at the Graduate Institute in Geneva. Her research illuminates how a singular focus on the role of institutions as means for co-optation and quelling of dissent overlooks the myriad of ways in which authoritarian regimes continue to be challenged both collectively and individually. Using the examples of pre-revolutionary Tunisia and Czechoslovakia, she argues for the need to move beyond institutional analyses and to pay attention to the more dynamic aspects of informal practices of power maintenance, evolving legitimacy of regimes, and cycles of protest and repression, thus bringing a temporal aspect to the analyses of authoritarian regime change and stability. Her article, “Protest in Authoritarian Regimes – From Everyday Resistance to Popular Uprisings: Tunisia and Czechoslovakia in the Decade before the Revolution” led to a discussion about the role of civil society in political transition.

The paper presented by Kylie Thomas, “Notes on Photography, History and Resistance”, focuses on how visual media affects the way the past is remembered and the future is shaped. Drawing on theorist of photography Roland Barthes’ description of cameras as “clocks for seeing”, her paper presents ideas about how photographs makes it possible not only for us to see time, but also disrupt historical chronologies and challenge how we think about ourselves in relation to the past. Her paper concludes by discussing photography as a form of resistance in post-apartheid South Africa, focusing in particular on how photographs that relate to forced removals under apartheid in the present are being used to contest neo-liberalism and gentrification, and the politics of restitution.

The second panel, “Ukraine and its path to Modernization”, was chaired by Kylie Thomas and included presentations and responses by Junior Visiting Fellows Artem Gergun and Dmytro Khutkyy. Gergun presented a detailed analysis of the demise of the welfare state under neo-liberalism and his approach takes inspiration from the work of three of the Senior Visiting Fellows who were in residence at the IWM in 2017, Kenichi Mishima, Claus Offe, and Moishe Postone. Gergun’s paper, “Extinction of the Welfare State: Revisiting Modernization Theory in the Context of Contemporary Ukraine” was followed by Khutkyy’s presentation, “The Burst of Electronic Democracy in Ukraine”. Khutkyy’s work shows how new forms of engagement between the state and its citizens have emerged in the aftermath of Maidan in Ukraine and focuses on e-democracy, e-governance, development, and social change.

The final panel, “Elites and Experts: Governance or Hegemony?” was chaired by Sofie Bedford and included papers by IWM Visiting Fellow, Ling Li and Junior Visiting Fellow, Aurel Niederberger. Li presented a paper entitled “Governance of Chinese Style and its Comparability”, which provided insight into the inner workings of the Chinese Communist Party structures. Her contribution to this collection of papers focuses on dissemination of information related to corruption and anticorruption in China. Niederberger’s paper, “Expert Networks and Hegemonic Practice in UN Arms Embargo Monitoring” drew on the research he conducted for his doctoral study on the work of

experts who constitute the UN expert panels on sanctions relating to the arms trade. His study shows that often when an organisation such as the United Nations is faced with a challenge, a crisis, or what Niederberger terms, “new uncertainties”, they resort to experts. And when these experts are similarly faced with enormous challenges, they resort to technical interventions. His paper illuminates how the political becomes technical and how, by rendering political issues technical, experts foreclose possibilities for contesting the way these issues are framed and addressed.

We are very grateful to Ivan Vejvoda for his advice and support, to Shalini Randeria, and to the staff at the IWM, particularly Mary Kemle-Gussnig, Luise Wascher and Ana Mohorić, for making this event possible.

The collection of papers presented here includes contributions from Sofie Bedford, Artem Gergun, Dmytro Khutkyy, Ling Li, Aurel Niederberger and Kylie Thomas.

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