



Workshop  
Thematic Module 4: Normative Conflicts and Transformations

*Performing the political: Alternative forms of organization and critique under conditions of democratic deconsolidation*

06-07 June 2024

Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies in Erfurt, Germany

Organizing Committee: Beatrice Renzi and Andreas Pettenkofer

In recent years, declines in civil liberties and political rights have affected not just authoritarian states, but also countries with long established democracies. In such cases of democratic deconsolidation, elections continue to be held at regular intervals and rights are not formally suspended. Rather, these changes are accomplished by incrementally disabling the constitutional mechanisms put in place to provide a check on executive aggrandizement, and by systematically targeting dissent. Liberal democratic states, too, have countered protests by increasingly employing legal instruments to criminalize dissent. Often, the charge is made that the dissenter is subverting not a particular state, a political agenda or a given ideology, but democracy as such. To this end, some political actors make efforts to enlist the judiciary and fourth branch institutions, and to promote broad discursive alignments in the media, academia and civil society at large. At the same time, in some of these cases, other predatory groups forge new exploitative practices to profit in the global market. Often, these practices are embedded in criminal networks wielding violence on migrant labors and territorial populations alike.

Nevertheless, even in ‘post-democratic’ societies, some protest movements have displayed surprising resilience. The workshop seeks to explore why and how some actors manage to create alternative forms of communication, organization, and power, often at high personal costs and under conditions where social coordination seems unlikely to be effectively sustained. In more general terms, the workshop invites reflection on the motivational set-up behind collective agency, the social processes that (sometimes) sustain this set-up, and the forms of activism employed to possibly consolidate resistance under severely adverse circumstances. It also wishes to engage real-live examples of self-organization, in order to possibly arrive at a sociology of ‘micro-utopias’. Thus, it aims to examine the conditions of human agency by exploring three interrelated types of processes: competitions between religious-secular normativities for moral legitimacy; (re)constitutions of collective identities via more or less malleable modes of relatedness; and the patterns of group formation, and mobilization for public recognition and access to resources.

In particular, we would like to consider, in a comparative trans-regional fashion, explanatory questions concerning the pursuit of critique-enabling processes and communities. For instance, how is a sense of collective belonging perceived and how does it implicate the form of protest and the establishment of alternative modes of organization? How are religious practices and

rituals employed to foster solidarity across diverse social formations and develop common experiential repertoires? What are the aesthetic enactments and the media techniques used to reclaim cultural and social spaces? To this end, how are subaltern performative traditions as well as micro-practices of justice brought to fruition?

At the same time, we are also interested in investigating the implications that emerge from empirical cases for the normative assumptions that undergird a given form of dissent and the ways in which theory formation might thus be articulated.

### **Thursday, June 06, 2024**

**Venue: C19.00.04 (Forschungsbau, Max-Weber-Allee, Universität Erfurt)**

**9:15**

Registration

**9:30**

Welcome and introduction: Beatrice Renzi (Max-Weber-Kolleg, Erfurt)

**9:45-11:15**

Andreas Pettenkofer (Max-Weber-Kolleg, Erfurt): *Current difficulties of collective action: How should we think about 'totalitarian' politics today?*

Saidalavi P.C. (Department of Sociology, Shiv Nadar University, Delhi)  
*Making of a Barber: Collective Agency and the Transformation of Self in South India*

Chair: Prathama Banerjee (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi)

**11:15-11:45**

Coffee break

**11:45-13:15**

Brahm Prakash (School of Arts and Esthetics, JNU, Delhi): *Strikes beyond the strike: Re-conceptualizing the model of strike beyond the material significance.*

Marco Omizzolo (Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche, Sapienza, Rome):  
*Enacting labor rights between Italy and India: Global agribusiness and the local food industry*

Chair: Shelley Feldman (Cornell University, Ithaca, New York)

**13:15-14:15**

Lunch break

**14:15-15:30**

*Survey city* (a film by Sanjay Srivastava, Matt Birkinshaw and Tarini Manchanda)

Introduction: Sanjay Srivastava (Department of Anthropology and Sociology, SOAS, London)

Discussant: Martin Fuchs (Max-Weber-Kolleg, Erfurt)

**15:30-16:00**

Coffee break

**16:00-17:30**

**Venue: Senatssaal, C 23 Mitarbeitergebäude MG 1, Main Entrance, Universität Erfurt**

Nrithya Pillai (Chennai) and Janani Ramesh (Boston): *Performance as Politics: Reclaiming a Non-Brahmin Praxis of Bharatanatyam*

Chair: Isabella Schwaderer (Religious Studies Department, Universität Erfurt)

**18:30**

Dinner

**Friday, June 07, 2024**

**Venue: C19.00.04 (Forschungsbau, Max-Weber-Allee, Universität Erfurt)**

**9:30-11:00**

Sanjay Jothe (Max-Weber-Kolleg, Erfurt): *Reclaiming cultural and social spaces in India: Innovating the Dalit movement from protest to ownership and empowerment.*

Hanna Werner (Max-Weber-Kolleg, Erfurt): *Contemporary youth environmental mobilizations at the nexus of legacy, identity politics, and outreach: a case study from Himachal Pradesh*

Chair: Juhi Tyagi (Azim Premji University, Bangaluru)

**11:00-11:30**

Coffee break

**11:30-13:00**

Pankaj Bharti (Department of Philosophy, Delhi University): *Contingency of language and folklore*

Michael Gottlob (Amnesty International, Berlin): *In search of a community of human rights defenders in India.*

Chair: Antje Linkenbach (Max-Weber-Kolleg, Erfurt)

**13:00-14:00**

Lunch break

**14:00-15:00**

Pina Sodano (Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche, Università degli Studi Roma Tre): *How to re-imagine resistance and the practice of citizenship from a Palestinian vantage point.*

Chair: Vidhu Verma (Centre for Political Studies, JNU, Delhi)

**15:00-15:30**

Coffee break

**15:30-17:00**

**Venue: C19.00.02/03 (Forschungsbau, Max-Weber-Allee, Universität Erfurt)**

Sharmistha Malik, Madhukhar Narayan and Dharm Prakash (Urban Folk): *Walking through the changing landscape of protest song and music in India*

Chair: Lars Aaberg (Max-Weber-Kolleg, Erfurt)

**17:00-17:30** Concluding discussion

**18:00** Reception