

Bringing in the South: towards a global paradigm for social movement studies

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Abstract

In this paper I argue for the systematic inclusion of Southern social movements in social movement theory, and I provide a framework comprised of four characteristics. This framework could serve as a starting point for research that accounts for the specificities of social movements in the global South while at the same time acknowledging their heterogeneity in diverse local contexts. The characteristics are not exhaustive, but most Southern movements exhibit one or a number of these characteristics and when taken together they could serve as the basis for decentring Northern movements and establishing a paradigm of social movements that is truly global. First, many Southern movements have emerged in the context of colonialism and post-colonialism which influenced the emergence, and continuity of particular forms of mobilizations. Second, social movements in the South emerge in contexts characterized by a variety of political structures and regime types. Third, in many mobilizations of the South, the continuous redefinition of the state-civil society relations influences the potentials for emergence and expansion of social movements. Finally, social movements in the South can be understood with regard to multiple forms of intersection in that there is usually an implicit connection between most social movements and democratisation processes (e.g. women's right movement, labour movement, environmental movement), between identity and material issues and formal and informal forms of politics.

Introduction

The Northern-centric spirit of social sciences and the existing hierarchies in the global division of knowledge production have triggered immense criticism over the past two decades (Wallerstein 1997; Mignolo 2002; Alatas 2003; Burawoy 2005; Connell 2007; de Sousa Santos 2007; Chakrabarty 2009; Comaroff & Comaroff 2012; Mentan 2015). This critical scholarship has opened discussions surrounding the possibilities of restructuring the social sciences. While some of the critics have dealt with the issue on a more theoretical and abstract level, others have suggested concrete ways to diversify the origin of social science scholarship. For example, Connell (2007) suggests increasing mutual regard and interaction between the dominant social theory in the North with the social theory and experience that has emerged in the South. She believes that Southern theories can offer valuable perspectives in understanding the contemporary world and transcending the existing hegemony in social sciences. Burawoy (2005:509) has proposed to

bring the social sciences down to earth by provincializing their universalism, their disciplinary divisions, and their methodology, that is grounding them in their particularity, their specific context of production, and exposing their contradictory participation in the social, economic and political worlds they seek to comprehend.

Burawoy's later writings on public sociology (Burawoy 2005b) explicitly seek to provincialize the social sciences. Similarly, Comaroff and Comaroff (2012) have called for "inverting the order of things" by developing theory based on empirical studies of the global South. They believe that currently the global South provides a much more useful context for analysis of the world as pervasive transformations and dynamics are by far more present in the South in comparison to the North.

Since its emergence as a subfield of sociology, social movement studies has gone through different paradigmatic shifts between North American and European approaches. Thus, it has not remained exempt from the above-mentioned critiques and in recent years scholars have addressed the problematic in various ways. Some scholars have criticized the Northern centric nature of major social movement journals (Poulson, Caswell & Gray 2014; Mac Sheoin 2016), while others have raised concerns about the inability of dominant social movement theory to explain social movements in specific regions in Latin America (Eckstein 1989; Foweraker & Craig 1990; Escobar & Alvarez 1992; Alvarez et al. 1998; Escobar 2008), Africa (Mamdani & Wamba-dia-Wamba 1995; Ellis & van Kessel 2009; Pilati 2011), South and Southeast Asia (Omvedt 1993; Oommen 2004; Scott 1985; Ford 2013), the Middle East (Bayat 2010; Beinin & Vairel 2013) or even Eastern Europe (Gyagi 2015; Pitrowski 2015). Finally, a number of scholars have explored the idea of overcoming the hegemonic trends in the field by emphasizing the value and significance of Southern social movements for development of a more inclusive paradigm for social movement studies (Thompson & Tapscott 2010; Motta & Nilsen 2011; Bringel & Dominguez 2015; Fadaee 2016a).

The existence of such extensive scholarship recognizing a problem in the dominant social movement paradigm in one way or another, has led to a number of proposals as remedies to the problem, such as: a more active engagement with scholarship and scholars from the South (Poulson, Caswell & Gray 2014); recognition of social movement scholarship produced in languages other than English (Cox & Flesher Fominaya 2013); focusing on emergent shared social meanings; strategies and articulations of demands across the North-South divide (Pleyers 2010) and the creation of platforms such as *openMovements* (see Bringel & Pleyers 2015) which provide an accessible space for the promotion of a global and public sociology of social movements. This transformative project for social movement studies must combine all of these strategies and should incorporate these diverse world views. However, I argue that recognising the prevalent characteristics of Southern social movements is a

pre-requisite for a more radical break with the Northern-centric nature of social movement studies, and a move towards a global social movement paradigm. Hence, in this article I provide a framework which could serve as a starting point for a systematic inclusion of Southern social movements in social movement theory. Therefore, I am not only arguing that social movement studies needs to be expanded by using Southern movements as empirical case studies that inform novel theory, but by developing a framework which identifies their prevailing characteristics I aim to provide a guideline for concrete theoretical and critical engagement necessary for our move towards de-provincializing canonical social movement theory. In the following section I introduce this framework comprised of four components, which highlights the uniqueness of Southern movements from social movements in Europe and North America. However, my objective is not to offer a comprehensive framework or epistemology of the movements in the South but to highlight four characteristics that prevail in many social movements of the global South. I do not argue that these characteristics are exclusive to Southern social movements – in fact they are occasionally exhibited by movements in the North – or that all four characteristics are apparent in every Southern movement. However, these are defining features of many Southern movements and they need to be taken seriously. Finally, I do not claim there is some archetypal Southern movement. On the contrary, these characteristics cohere in different places and times in a variety of ways and the particular manifestation of these characteristics must be established in the course of in-depth research.

Four characteristics of social movements in the global South: a framework for research

A systematic engagement with the existing literature on Southern social movements shows that social movement scholarship in different regions of the global South emphasises different issues and provides different perspectives (Fadaee 2016a). Therefore, it becomes clear that “there is no *one* social movement studies of the global South” (Cox 2017). Moreover, within the past years there has been a rise in literature which disapproves the existence of a distinction between the global North and the global South in the contemporary world. If it is not easy to identify a particular trend in all Southern social movements and we are even not sure of which societies belong to the global South anymore, can we then say that we should not think about the global South and its movements as a coherent category? de Sousa Santos (2007) and Bayat’s (2016) engagement with these questions seems very convincing because they suggest that global South should not be understood as a geographical entity but rather as an analytical category in the sense that most Southern societies have experienced colonial and post-colonial and/or imperial epochs in their histories. This unique mode of encounter with the West, has given rise to various structures and multiple enunciation of modernity in these regions which in many occasions are different from the countries without colonial/imperial experiences and encounter similar structures and settings. This is the case even

in countries such as Iran or Thailand which were never directly colonized. With this conceptualization, it is plausible to argue that the social mobilizations articulating change in these regions are to a large extent different from their counter parts. However, because of the historical and structural differences between settler's politics in the North Atlantic and Europe's inner colonies such as Ireland this definition does not refer to these countries. In other words, this analytical category is relevant to the African, Latin American and some of the Asian countries which to some extent share a *similar* history of colonial and post-colonial development. Some critics might still remain unconvinced by my definition of the global South and point out the fact that the experience of colonialism/post-colonialism has been different in the above-mentioned countries and regions. I am sympathetic to these criticisms. The global South is in fact a construct and its definition is constantly changing. Nevertheless, the following features define characteristics of the movements that have emerged in most of Africa, Latin America as well as some of the Asian countries which have in one way or another have been under colonial or imperial rule and were until recently referred to as the 'Third World.'

First, many Southern movements have emerged in the context of colonialism and post-colonialism which influenced the emergence, and continuity of particular forms of mobilizations. Second, social movements in the South emerge in contexts characterized by a variety of political structures and regime types. Third, in many mobilizations of the South the continuous redefinition of the state-civil society relations influences the potentials for emergence and expansion of social movements. Finally, social movements in the South can be understood with regard to multiple forms of intersection in that there is usually an implicit connection between most social movements and democratisation processes (e.g. women's right movement, labour movement, environmental movement), between identity and material issues, and formal and informal forms of politics.

1. Many Southern social movements have emerged in the context of colonialism and post-colonialism.

From the late eighteenth century, the anti-colonial movements were at work in constructing a counter-hegemonic discourse that undermined the legitimacy of the colonial powers (Anderson 2007) and for a long period the most significant uprisings and social movements in most parts of the global South were anti-colonial in one way or another. Even the armed guerrilla movements of the 1970s were inspired by anti-colonial writers such as Frantz Fanon as much as Marxist writers and many had their roots in older traditions of anti-colonial resistance. Similarly, imperialism has to a large extent affected social movements and contentious politics in regions such as Latin America and the Middle East. In her analysis of social movements in Egypt and Iran, Povey (2015: 10) has shown that the impact of imperialism "is not uniform or predictable but multifaceted and complex" as imperialism has on the one hand "undermined the authoritarian states and provided an incentive for people in

the region to join movements” and on the other hand it “has served to strengthen authoritarian states and allowed them to crack down on dissent”. Similarly, Fadaee (2012) has demonstrated how the three major social movements of Iran in the twentieth century, i.e. the constitutional movement (1905-1907), the national oil movement (1951-1953) and the revolutionary movement of 1979 all had strong anti-imperialist sentiments.

After the period characterised by anti-colonial/anti imperial national struggles, the spirit of Bandung and the shared experience of exploitation gave rise to an international solidarity and a call for justice and a new global economic order in the years that followed (Escobar 2004: 207). In fact, “the postcolonial was shaped by social movements that challenged the hegemony of dominant social groups and states across the world” (Motta & Nilsen 2011: 3). For example the uprisings of the 1960s which provided a cornerstone for emergence of the New Social Movement Theory in Europe and Resource Mobilization Theory in North America were fundamentally different in the global South in that in the South these social movements “created a new discourse of entitlement centered on subaltern groups and popular classes within the independent states of the Third World who posited themselves as being entitled both to dignified livelihoods and political recognition and participation” (Nilsen 2006: 277). In *Reinventing Revolution* Omvedt (1993) demonstrates how in India, women, *Adivasis*¹, *Dalits*² and workers in the informal sector shaped the cornerstone of the so-called new social movements in the post-independence era. She emphasizes the fact that these social groups which were historically dispossessed and marginalised mobilized outside the sphere of formal politics and confronted the developmental state which was dominated by the elite. Similarly, Oommen (2004) traces the mobilizations and movements of India and South Asia to what he calls an *Indian Modernity*. He shows that unlike the industrial societies of the North, the working class has never constituted a revolutionary class in India and in fact the so called “old” movements of India were anti-colonial movements with no clear class character. Accordingly, the new movements of India challenge the failure of the post-colonial state to redistribute wealth, opportunity and power and hence, are concerned with equality and social justice.

The post-Bandung period generated a strong movement for non-alignment which remained highly critical of the economic order of the new empire (Escobar 1992). Beginning in the early 1980s different experiences of developmental states and their encounter with structural adjustment shaped a new wave of resistance in the post-colony. The anti-IMF mobilizations of the 1980s and 1990s were carried on by a variety of social groups who expressed discontent with the policies of the post-colonial states on a domestic level as well as their new political and economic role in the new global configuration of power after the collapse of the colonial powers (Motta & Nilsen 2011). In this

¹ Adivasis are the tribal population of South Asia.

² Dalit is the political name of the ex-untouchables in India.

period the oppositional movements played a significant role in reconceptualising development, and instead of state-led development they asserted that popular movements could be agents for meaningful transformation (Mamdani et al. 1988). Their proposals for alternative ways of organising societies in many instances led to the emergence of “alternatives to development” and anti-development discourses (Escobar 1992). In addition to criticising the policies of developmental states on a national level, these movements also challenged the legacy of development programmes and policies which had started during the colonial time as well as the transnational development regimes (Sinha 2008). However, since the 1990s NGOs and funding agencies from the global North have played an important role in undermining popular struggles against developmental and neoliberal policies.

Finally, in the post colony the legacy of colonialism has been prevalent in the so-called identity based movements such as women rights movements. Postcolonial feminism, although closely entangled with the rise of Third World feminism in the US, emerged as a response to the feminism based on experience of Western cultures and is concerned with understanding the ways long-lasting social, cultural, political and economic influences of colonialism has impacted the women in the postcolonial world and the trajectories that have led to emergence of distinguished forms of feminism from the so called “Western feminism” (see Mohanty 2003; Ali 2007).

2. Social movements in the South emerge in contexts characterised by a variety of political structures and regime types.

The political system in most advanced capitalist countries in the global North is a variant of liberal democracy. Consequently, the social movement theories and analytical tools developed in the global North are also useful in these political contexts. Although there are indeed varieties of liberal democracy, they have in common respect for certain rights and freedoms such as the freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and a large spectrum of rights usually referred to as human rights. On the contrary, countries in the global South exhibit a very broad range of regime types from liberal democratic to semi-democratic, and from authoritarian to semi-authoritarian regimes. As the regime type defines who can become active, how and to what extent, this diversity has led to the emergence of a multiplicity of opportunities and cultures of activism in the South (Bourdrea 2004; Caraway 2006). For example, in his analysis of social movements in Latin America, Foweraker (1995) refers to the relationship between social movements and the newly established post-military democracies of Latin America as the relationship between the “elite” and the “people” because the newly established democracies remained exclusionary and dominated by the elite. He refers to these regimes as “democracy by default” and defines them as political systems which “will not conform neatly to any of our theoretical or practical models of authoritarian and democratic regimes” (Malloy 1987: 252 cf Foweraker 2016: 113). Kim (2016) has presented a detailed description of the role of social movements in transition to democracy in South

Korea and shows how the complex political reality that emerged after democratization influenced social movements and their relations with institutionalised political actors.

After the independence from colonialism, most of the post-colonial states have suffered (or are still suffering) from authoritarianism or military rules. On the one hand, most of these undemocratic regimes have been the main target of mobilization. On the other hand, under these repressive regimes dissent and contentious politics become a serious challenge (Bayat 2016). For example, in Latin America, after independence Mexico and Venezuela established “personalistic dictatorships” and Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Colombia and Brazil founded “oligarchic, low-intensity democracies” (Ortiz 2015: 44). At the same time, emergence of the labour movement in the late nineteenth century and the Russian Revolution of 1917, led to an outbreak of labour and peasant movements that, in most cases, faced by serious state repression (Ortiz 2015).

Moreover, in an authoritarian regime, open opposition does not always remain an option and this leads to the emergence of secretive and underground movements which are inherently different from organized and open forms of mobilizations. As the underground movements and organisations cope with a high level of risk, this influences the internal dynamics of these movements such as the identity of activists, their mobilization strategies and their connections with other similar movements and organisations (Thomas 2001).

Furthermore, in a liberal democracy such as India, democratic practices have remained fragile and exclusive leading to emergence of a non-responsive and at time a repressive state where many subaltern groups remain marginalised (Chatterjee 2004), civil liberties are commonly suspended, and the press is routinely censored. For example, Nilsen’s account of Adivasi mobilizations in India shows how they are forced to circumnavigate their position as subaltern subjects (Nilsen 2012b) within the “everyday tyranny” of state officials such as forest guards or police constables (Nilsen 2012a).

Finally, in recent years activists in the global South have increasingly used the Internet and new social media and in response repressive regimes have sought to develop ways to systematically control this new space. There has been a lot of coverage of internet shutdowns in various countries, or persecution of individuals for writing critical comments on Facebook or Twitter. In *Revolution in the Age of Social Media* Herrera (2014) illustrates the role social media has played in Egypt's January 25 Revolution of 2011. She demonstrates the dynamics of power struggle that took place in social media and shows how powerful forces such as the Egyptian military took over the control of the digital revolutionary platforms. Elsewhere Herrera (2015) shows how the Internet has become one of the most important tools in facilitating repression against activists and citizenship claims in the Middle East.

3. In many societies in the South the continuous redefinition of state-civil society relations influences the potential for the emergence and expansion of social movements.

Civil society has been repeatedly defined as an arena which is “outside the state in an increasingly independent social sphere” (Arato 1981: 23). Yet, writing from a Fascist jail in late 1920s and early 1930s, Antonio Gramsci (1995) remained sceptical of the independence of civil society from the state apparatus. He emphasized the difference between the civil society (educational system, family, unions, etc) and political society (legal system, police, army, etc), and argued that the capitalist state rules in both spheres albeit through different mechanisms: political society is the realm of force whereas hegemony serves to establish consent in civil society. According to Habermas (1991) this version of a tightly controlled civil society was transformed in Europe by the emergence of a relatively open and less regulated public sphere, characterised by democratic and rational communication. He argues that the proliferation of print media contributed to the transformation of civil society, and it became “network of associations that institutionalizes problem-solving discourses on questions of general interest inside the framework of organized public spheres” (Habermas 1996: 367). Thus, although states were increasingly committed to capitalism, civil society remained a relatively autonomous social space wherein the power of the state was limited (Cohen & Arato 1992).

However, in much of the global South the notion of civil society remains a foreign concept that does not resonate with actually existing political cultures and institutions. This leads to a continuous and vivid definition and redefinition of state-civil society relations to the extent that the change of one government to another can lead to a dramatic shift in the relations between the state and civil society and can to a large extent influence the likelihood of emerging autonomous social mobilizations. For example, in Iran, the rise and expansion of the Reform Movement in the 1990s consolidated the troubled state-society relations that dominated the post 1979 revolutionary era and led to the emergence of a strong civil society. Consequently, a number of social movements such as the women’s movement, the student movement and an environmental movement emerged. These movements were enabled by the particular state-society relationship that obtained during the reform era, and in the aftermath of the crackdown on the Reformists they disappeared, were weakened or were fundamentally transformed (Fadaee 2011; 2016b).

Similarly, in Southeast Asia the scope and nature of political space in which activism can take place has continuously been a matter of contention. Despite these challenges in some countries such as in the Philippines in 1986, Thailand in 1992 and Indonesia in 1998, social movements have facilitated the overthrow of authoritarian governments. However, in most Southeast Asian countries the state still remains pervasive in all forms of institutions through which activists can potentially mobilize. Therefore, the scope and essence of activism within the political space remains contentious and undefined. Hence, in some parts of Southeast Asia we have witnessed emergence of different forms of

“individualized political expression” which are to some extent autonomous from the state or relatively autonomous “civil society expression” (Rodan 2013). Butenhoff (1999) has demonstrated that as a result of the specific relations between the state and civil society in Hong Kong, many of the social movement organizations that emerged in the 1980s were incorporated into the political system and were transformed to political parties. According to Habib (2005) in post-apartheid South Africa an adversarial-collaborative divide dominates the civil society. While under Apartheid this divide was racial, the post-apartheid state has extended its adversarial or collaborate relations to the entire civil society.

In *Beyond Civil Society*, Alvarez and her colleagues (2017) illustrate that the conventional distinctions between activism on the streets and through formal institutions, as well as between civic and un-civic protest, does not explain the complexity of activism in contemporary Latin America. In fact, as activists in Latin America operate within a fluid and dynamic sphere of civil society contestation and through different forms and moments of activism, they open up new democratic spaces and extend existing ones. Chatterjee’s recognition of a civil and a political society in India hints at similar dynamics. He argues that political society is the sphere of actually existing politics where subaltern groups can advance claims, engage the state and render outcomes contingent. Meanwhile, civil society complements formal electoral politics and provides space for middle classes to participate in politics by forming associations and engaging elected representatives and appointed bureaucrats (Chatterjee 2004). Finally, Mamdani (1995) challenges the notion of modern civil society in the context of post-colonial states of Africa because only the bureaucratic and Westernized elite and professional civil servants supporting the state were represented as fitting in the modern civil society while the traditional civil society i.e. ordinary citizens and people from rural areas were not conceived as part of the civil society.

4. Social movements in the South should be understood with regard to multiple forms of intersections in that there is usually an implicit connection between most social movements and democratisation processes, between identity and material issues and formal and informal forms of politics.

In most social movements in the global South there is usually an implicit connection to democratisation processes. This means that even social movements which might explicitly be understood as labour, identity based and/or quality of life movements remain engaged with the struggle for democratisation. For example, the emergence and development of the Iranian environmental movement has clear linkages with processes of democratisation and the rise and fall of the reform movement which emerged as a pro-democracy movement, opposing the hegemony of the conservatives in post-revolutionary Iran (Fadaee, 2012; 2016c). The women’s movement in South

Korea participated in the transition to democracy in the 1990s and the movement has continued to demand democratic rights (Hur 2011).

Second, in the global South material issues remain a central subject in many mobilizations. Hence, there is usually a significant inter-class dimension in Southern movements in the sense that they represent the interests of middle classes as well as the lower classes. Moreover, occasionally and/or temporarily middle class movements are joined by lower classes or vice versa. For example, Ford (2009) has shown that in Indonesia a group of middle-class activists have been engaged in middle-class as well as lower class problems and even one group of activists has moved from an environmental NGO to a labour NGO. In the Korean women's movement working class women and their middle-class counter parts work hand in hand on cultural as well as economic matters, especially after the economic crisis (Hur 2011). Similarly, the Green Movement of Iran which was a pro-democracy political movement that emerged after the presidential election of 2009 managed to bring large segments of the middle classes together with the lower classes despite its middle-class origins (Fadaee 2013).

Finally, as informality is a prominent feature of most societies in the global South, this has significantly impacted dynamics of mobilizations in these societies and in many instances, it has created intersections between formal and informal forms of struggle in the sense that there is usually an informal component to the formal modes of mobilization. Bayat (2010) refers to these informal forms of collective action which are mostly popular in the global South as "non-movements" which he defines as

the collective actions of non-collective actors; they embody shared practices of large numbers of ordinary people whose fragmented but similar activities trigger much social change, even though these practices are rarely guided by an ideology or recognisable leaderships and organizations. (Bayat 2010: 14).

In the first instance non-movements may bear some resemblance to lifestyle politics and everyday politics of consumption, yet the point Bayat makes is that due to repression, the impossibility of organised activism or its ineffectiveness, ordinary people respond to their grievances through social non-movements. In other words, in contrast to lifestyle politics (e.g. shopping for organic produce from a local market), it is a direct-action strategy that reduces the cost of mobilization in the context of high-stakes street politics. Non-movement mobilizations can gain momentum and become overt if the political opportunity structure is altered and an opportunity arises. For example, Bayat (2017) shows that the genesis of the Arab Spring was a plethora of non-movements, many of which had a long history, but to observers unfamiliar with such everyday politics the eruption of popular street politics appeared spontaneous.

Chatterjee (2004) reflecting on the struggles of the poor in India, refers to these forms of mobilizations as "popular politics in most of the world" and articulates

them as politics of the poor in contrast to the middle-class politics which is organised and deliberative. However, unlike Chatterjee, Bayat does not limit these forms of mobilizations to the poor and the impoverished. For example, in his analysis of women's struggle in post-revolutionary Iran, he shows that as in the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian revolution, women faced systematic oppression and resisted through daily practices in public domains by pushing the boundaries of tolerated Islamic dress code, by participating in sports and by asserting their right to study in universities (Bayat 2007). However, in periods of more political freedom this women's non-movement was complemented by a deliberate organised women organisations and campaigns.

Conclusions

Scholars of social movements have increasingly acknowledged the need for a more global understanding of social movements, yet actually achieving this remains challenging. In this article I have argued for the necessity of globalising or de-provincializing canonical social movement theory by using Southern movements as empirical case studies that inform theory. I presented a framework which draws our attention to the significance of historical contexts and the structural transformation of Southern societies, as well as their complex social, political, cultural and institutional intermingling. This framework is not meant to be exhaustive, but it can serve as a starting point for a transformative social movement research situated within debates that have enriched sociology over the course of the past two decades surrounding (1) the Northern-centric essence of sociology and the extent to which theories, concepts and practices can travel across the North-South divide, (2) knowledge that has been developed around social movements of the global South and the broader project of a Southern theory (e.g. subaltern studies), and (3) its relationship to scholarship in and about places and populations which have traditionally been ignored by Northern academia (e.g. indigenous knowledge).

Moreover, I hope this framework can provide a guidance for finding appropriate theoretical channels and innovative empirical starting points, foster situated understandings of Southern movements across space and time and provide a driving force for understanding the interaction between local, regional and global processes and their dialectics. In *Global Modernity and Social Contestation* Bringel and Domingues (2015) have shown how Southern societies and their struggles have historically been part of global modernity. Through multiple examples the book historicizes social contestation and their linkages to multiple trajectories of modernity. Key concepts are discussed in order to make sense of the distinctiveness of social contestations and modernity in different parts of the world and their significance for our understanding of current global developments. Social movement studies is in urgent need of more similar work to foster a better underrating of long term historical developments and local, social and political structures and economic disparities as well as how certain social groups such as working classes, middle classes, the elite as well as groups based on certain forms of identity such as women groups have evolved in a

particular context and if and/or how they have been connected to the local and/or contentious politics.

Despite these necessities in my opinion we still need to critically engage with one fundamental question: what should our ultimate objective be for a transformative social movement research? Is it essential to articulate a distinct social movement study of the global South? Or shall we think of globalising social movement theory? Cox (2017) recounts different traditions of social movement research and underlines the significance of connection between social movement studies and multiple epistemologies of knowledge and theory in general. Accordingly, he encourages movement researchers to move towards a more reflective and reflexive understanding of multiple traditions of social movement research. He warns us of “the *a priori* dismissal of others” when their ways of thinking do not resemble ours and encourages social movement researchers to “live with diversity”. In a *Foreword* to the recent volume *Understanding Southern Social Movements* (Fadaee 2016a), Bayat raises similar concerns and asserts that “it is neither wise nor necessary to build another orthodoxy [i.e. a paradigm for the South]; rather one needs to break and amend the existing orthodoxies by developing critical and productive conversation with the Northern perspective” (Bayat 2016: xxiv). Similarly, I maintain that we should not abandon the concepts and theories of mainstream social movement scholarship that have shaped the field over the years, but we need a critical engagement and provocative starting points for such conversation. In his account of the global justice movement, Pleyers (2010) suggests such a conversation becomes possible if we start developing multi-site and multi-scalar research influenced by fieldwork in the global South and North where actors, movements and debates from the South and North are combined. Although this proposal provides a constructive ground to move forward I believe that a “productive conversation with Northern perspective” first and foremost should challenge the universal claims of mainstream social movement theory by emphasizing the dominant characteristics of the movements in the South. This could serve as a preliminary step for moving towards developing multi-site and multi-scalar research projects and eventually globally relevant theoretical frameworks.

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