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Le texte

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Abstract

This paper reflects on the implications of the contemporary diversity of intellectual approaches to the study of social movements. Sketching some of the key dimensions of difference in the field, it explores the normative intellectual questions raised by /acknowledging this diversity as well as the intellectual history questions involved in explaining it. In a global perspective, the question of what a "social movement studies of the global South" might mean exemplifies the challenge involved. The paper draws on Aristotle's typology of knowledge to suggest some ways of handling this situation, before concluding with some open questions.

Keywords

social movements, sociology of knowledge, disciplinary norms, interdisciplinarity, normativity, sociology of the global South

Les traditions plurielles de recherches en mouvements sociaux : théoriser la diversité intellectuelle

Résumé

Le but du présent article est d'offrir un certain nombre de réflexions sur la diversité des approches actuelles à l'étude des mouvements sociaux. Il propose une esquisse des divergences clé qu'on trouve dans ce domaine, et passe en revue les questions intellectuelles normatives soulevées par la reconnaissance de cette diversité, ainsi que les questions relevant de l'histoire des idées soulevées par toute tentative d'explication. Dans une perspective globale, la question de ce que pourrait constituer une étude des mouvements sociaux du Sud illustre le défi auquel on se trouve confronté. L'auteur s'inspire de la typologie aristotélicienne du savoir pour proposer quelques moyens possibles pour gérer cette situation.

Mots-clefs

mouvements sociaux, sociologie du savoir, normes disciplinaires, interdisciplinarité, normativité, sociologie du Sud

Sommaire

Introduction

Why should we think about social movements at all? Or why think about them within the context of global studies? As a topic of academic research, social movements are something of a "poor relation": there is widespread disdain for the subject as being either *événementiel* or enthusiastic. However, we also find movements regularly used for "kindling" as Borges puts it, for example in academic cover images, introductory stories or discussions of practical implications. This mild schizophrenia could be interpreted as a kind of bad faith: on the one hand academia seeks publicly respectable subjects and even vaunts a certain degree of tedium as a mark of intellectual rigour – but on the other the dramatic figures of movements are used to attract the interests of students, readers and for that matter policy-makers in order to justify particular kinds of study.

This could be read at one level as the challenge raised by a sociology of action to a sociology of structure; but the study of social movements also raises important epistemological questions around knowledge and the place of theory, both in universities and in the wider world. If we turn to face in the other direction, we see that social movement studies experience great difficulty in asserting sole ownership over their object of study. Other academic disciplines, but also movement-derived traditions of thought (notably Marxism, feminism and anarchism), equally claim the right to speak on the subject. They do so more or less effectively in different contexts, but often more effectively than do social movement studies. Scholars in the field can readily observe that an unusually high proportion of public and media commentary on movements is entirely unaware that they are the subject of academic expertise in their own right.

This is on the one hand a sign of how much movements matter: as with sociology more generally, it is because they are matters of general concern that others think about them systematically but using their own academic and non-academic categories. On the other hand this situation should propel movement researchers towards a more reflective, and reflexive, understanding which attempts to situate what we do, and these other traditions, in a wider perspective.

The last decade and a half in particular has seen a great enrichment of the space of dialogue in relation to social movements. This derives not so much from any major expansion of third level education in most countries, let alone a rising power of social movement studies within the university. Rather, it is the result of the network of movements broadly discussed as a "movement of movements" or alterglobalisation movement, or more recently as (for example) anti-austerity movements or the mobilisations of 2011 and beyond. These widespread movements have brought questions of collective action much more to the centre of public and hence also academic attention than was the case in the 1990s. At the same time, the multiplicity of movements and sites of conflict and the scale of challenges involved have also contributed to encourage reflection about movements in general, as distinct from the specifics of individual campaigns.

In this context, the phrase "social movements", but also other terms for collective action (e.g. "civil society", "resistance" or "participation"), alongside discussions of the themes which movements organise around, have certainly become much more widespread, including in the form of journals, conferences and academic networks. However, this is far from meaning that "social movement studies" in any simple form have become an uncontested pole of attraction. If anything, we have seen a greater interest in dialogue of various kinds: as we conceptualise this on the journal Interface, this has meant dialogue between different academic disciplines, between different intellectual and political traditions, between movement-based theorising and academic research, between different regions of the world and between reflections around different kinds of movement.

This much is familiar and in many ways welcome. It is at one and the same time an assertion of the value of what movement researchers do and an enrichment of our reflections that each new month seems to bring the need to engage with new ways of thinking and talking about collective action, from the most diverse academic and extra-academic sources. I have written about this elsewhere from a normative point of view (Barker C. and Cox L. 2011, Cox L. and Flesher Fominaya C. 2009), but here I want to step back from those arguments and note that one tide which these normative arguments about intellectual

practice have ridden is that of academic and media globalisation and the increased use of English. Specifically, the pre-existing fact of very different traditions within different national and linguistic contexts has become an impulse for a new sort of encounter within the new kinds of journals, conferences and networks (or new turns within familiar fora) that scholars are becoming used to.

One thing which these encounters throw up in quite stark relief is the different assumptions that are made within different disciplines, national scientific cultures and intellectual traditions about the position of movement-based thought and reflection. There are, for example, academic contexts where it is entirely normal for movement researchers also to be highly visible public militants and to publish works which are intended for both activist and academic audiences, as well as contexts where this combination of roles is entirely unacceptable, in some cases even if the individual carries them out separately. We also have very different methodological and theoretical assumptions about if and how researchers should listen to movement participants and for what reasons. Because this issue goes to the heart of several different normative conceptions of intellectual work, I use it as a guiding thread throughout this piece and return to it at various times.

Living with intellectual diversity: assertion, dismissal, integration

Individual scholars have necessarily learned how to think and write about social movements within one or more concrete social and institutional contexts, through various processes of secondary socialisation. They may for example have first learned to think politically within a movement, completed an undergraduate degree in one discipline in one country and successfully established themselves as graduate or professional researchers within another discipline in another country: such trajectories are common in the post-Seattle generations of researchers. In the process, scholars have of course internalised many different assumptions and invested substantially in what are actually quite situation-specific forms of cultural capital, while also perhaps negotiating the complexities between the different modes of reflecting on movements that they have been trained in.

What I want to suggest is that on the whole our practical ability to shift between registers, or (metaphorically) to creolise and draw on prior learning within our current language, tends to outstrip our explicit reflection on the subject; we are not always necessarily *reflexive* in our relationship to these different modes of thinking. This is of course particularly important insofar as we are engaged in performative speech (or more often writing) acts, such as peer review of publications or grant proposals, writing professional recommendations or making academic appointments. Such processes require us in a sense to naturalise our own intellectual approach, to take up a position from which we can straightforwardly assess someone else's work in terms of its performance within our own terms of reference. In so doing, of course, we not only naturalise our own approach and ascribe value to it – we also implicitly dismiss other approaches to a greater or lesser extent[1].

My suggestion, then, is that in those kinds of speech act which are particularly powerful in the construction of academic formations – and hence both for the social realities of intellectual activity and for how we reflect collectively – we are not always as reflective in relation to our own approaches as we might be in other circumstances, or as our own learning processes might suggest. It is perhaps one of the most common experiences in contemporary social movements research – both as subject and as object – to praise or be praised, dismiss or be dismissed, on the basis of (often implicit) assumptions as to what counts as good or bad within a particular approach to movements.

I am not of course arguing that we should have no such criteria: intellectual work is necessarily normative in this kind of way. But precisely because of this fact, it takes a particular kind of effort not to naturalise what we find locally valuable for our purpose and not to set to one side what might be called our tacit knowledge (Wainwright H. 1994) about other approaches to the study of the same phenomenon. In other words, as in other kinds of cultural and linguistic situations, we tend to conform to locally powerful assumptions. This sits uneasily – or it should do – with our practical awareness that these assumptions

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1. I leave aside the question of how far we make a strategic choice of which approach to adopt that is actually based on other criteria (for good or ill), but experienced scholars will certainly have noticed this in their colleagues, even if it may be harder to see in ourselves.

are not universal and that they are by no means necessarily shared by our peers in other countries, in other academic fields in our own country, or for that matter by reflective practitioners within the movements we study.

Gramsci notes, I think rightly, that the true winner of an argument is not the person who dismisses another's perspective but the person who can show how the other's perspective can itself be explained by, and integrated within, one's own. Of course this kind of demonstration means one thing in a political context and another in an intellectual context. What follows does not attempt to "win" the argument in a Gramscian sense, but it does seek to offer some ways of thinking about the problem of understanding social movements that go some way towards his requirement to account for our own positions in ways that do not simply involve the emic restatement of our own particular founding texts and precepts and the *a priori* dismissal of others where they do not coincide with these.

At a less sophisticated level, we might note the simple presence of fear around particular kinds of research choice. I regularly hear this expressed by graduate students and junior researchers in less public discussions, both in the instrumental sense – "I am attracted by what you are saying, but surely there won't be any posts, funding or institutional recognition for that" – and in a more internalised sense of fear that by making a particular intellectual choice one is setting oneself apart from science or objectivity, laying oneself open to charges of bias or parti pris, etc. It is of course possible to feel the latter without fear, in an active adherence to or defence of orthodoxy. The fear of falling outside orthodoxy, however, tells us something important about the social realities of orthodoxy as a social practice.

J. Jasper recently – and somewhat implausibly given his own leading position in the field – presented what he understands as the practice of objective social science research on movements as being under siege by an army of militant researchers proposing a new, and apparently victorious, orthodoxy (Jasper J. 2015). Personally I am far more used to a situation of having to encourage researchers, in many countries, who fear for the costs to their career if they are seen to have any sympathy for or involvement in the movements they study, or who feel that they have to act two entirely different parts, as militants in one place

and as researchers in another. Both experiences, however, are indicative of the same problem: how do we relate, as social actors, to the choices we make in respect of our intellectual practices, in a situation of conflictual diversity of doxa?

Outline of a research project

The research project under discussion here draws on a variety of intellectual experiences to approach this subject. Firstly, as noted above, it is something my colleagues and I have been practically exploring within *Interface*, where we have tried to enable the kinds of dialogue mentioned (across disciplines, across movements, across intellectual traditions, across global regions and between researchers and activist theorists) while simultaneously carrying out effective peer review on a practitioner research model familiar from other fields such as nursing, international relations or architecture (drawing on both academic researchers and movement practitioners) and while recognising the intellectual diversity of different regions of the world (through distinct editorial groups and peer review processes in different contexts). In doing this, we have not attempted to construct a meta-language to enable evaluation of all the different kinds of intellectual approaches in question. Nonetheless, over 16 issues and 8 years, we have built up a substantial body of practical understanding of the nature of the intellectual challenges involved. In other words we have attempted to put B. de Sousa Santos' (2006) call for an "ecology of knowledges" into practice.

Secondly, I have paid particular attention to the dialogue between the different forms of knowledge and subject positions of academic researchers and movement theorists, notably in the dialogue between Marxism and social movement studies (which is of course also an encounter between different academic disciplines, or between two multidisciplinary approaches in some cases) and in the participatory action research programmes involving movement participants carrying out research at PhD and MA levels at the National University of Ireland Maynooth (Cox L. 2014, 2015).

Thirdly, and more recently, I have been exploring the characteristics of European social movement research traditions with C. Flesher Fominaya and scholars in the Council for European Studies (Flesher Fominaya C. and Cox L. 2013),

and more specifically those of research on social movements in Ireland. G. Accornero and O. Fillieule's (2016) book on social movement studies in Europe asks the same question in a different mode. Even within this supposedly relatively homogenous European space – which according to canonical origin myths has been largely hybridised with the North American model since the later 1980s – diversity is the rule rather than the exception (although, as with linguistic diversity, we do not always acknowledge this).

The present project starts from a series of comparisons. The first is perhaps rather grandiose: it is to compare the "Maynooth approach" of participatory action research in social movement practice with the "CADIS approach" of sociological intervention. I realise that the Maynooth approach is a minnow to CADIS' whale. However both are varieties of what might be imagined as public or engaged sociology with one face, while with the other face they represent varieties of dialogue between researchers and activists at the micro-level of a single institutionalised approach with a clear geographical base. These two approaches can be placed on a spectrum that includes other social movement centres in Europe (e.g. COSMOS, Göteborg, Bochum, the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin, Brighton…); national journals (e.g. Forschungsjournal soziale Bewegungen, Partecipazione e Conflitto, Mouvements des idées et des luttes, Interface, Social Movement Studies, Moving the Social…)and perhaps also conferences or mailing lists (Alternative Futures and Popular Protest, bewegungsforschung etc.).

The second, equally grandiose perhaps, is to to relate the Interface model to the manifesto of ISA47's current leadership (International Sociological Association 2014a, b; Bringel B. and Pleyers G. 2015) and to the wider project expressed in Penser global (Wieviorka M. et al. 2015; cf Wieviorka M. 2013, Hautcouer P. and Wieviorka M. 2014, Calhoun C. and Wieviorka M. 2015) and the Collège d'études mondiales. Here we also find concrete, institutionally-located practices – but now understood explicitly as practices for mediating between different national and disciplinary specificities in the practice of social research (not necessarily of course in terms of relationship to movements). The hope is that these two comparisons will then enable a closer identification of the dimensions along which such approaches differ.

Thirdly, there are some existing bases for a broader comparison of national approaches to social movements: the previously-mentioned collections by Flesher Fominaya C. and Cox L. (2013) and by Fillieule O. and Accornero G. (2016) do this in relation to Europe, as do Gagyi A.'s (2015) reflections on nominally "European" social movement research's difficulties in relation to movements in East and Central Europe (see also Piotrowski G. 2015). These offer some starting-points for reflecting more systematically on the different norms which operate at a national and disciplinary level, and to which researchers with allegiance to a particular intellectual tradition necessarily need to relate themselves if they are to be able to continue doing so professionally within that context, in terms of funding and appointments.

Lastly, this recognition of geographical diversity may enable us to draw on the current debate on sociologies of the global South, as well as some recent work on the Northern biases of social movement studies (Poulson S. et al. 2014, MacSheoin T. 2016) and my own reflections on Ireland as a postcolonial state and the implications for movement research (Cox L. 2016), to ask rhetorically what the "social movement studies of the global South" (Fadaee S. 2016; cf Nilsen A. and Roy S. 2015) might be – or more exactly to ask if an intellectual approach which is not centred in the global North and which takes the intellectual lessons of postcolonial studies seriously points towards a different kind of social movement studies, or for that matter towards a social movement studies at all.

Mapping intellectual diversity in social movement studies

I want to start by putting slightly more shape on the empirical realities of intellectual diversity in social movement studies. In the European context alone we can note a series of centres of social movement research (not all of which would describe themselves in this language). If we take a handful of examples, we can see that while all are very diverse the general understanding of what research is, how it is to be carried out and the relationship between researchers and movements is rather different as between e.g.

- The Collège d'études mondiales;

- The COSMOS centre (formerly at the European University Institute, now at the Scuola Normale Superiore Firenze), tied to D. della Porta's research programme;

- Göteborg University's Forum for Civil Society and Social Movement Research, strongly affected by critical urban studies (Holgersson et al. 2010);

- The National University of Ireland Maynooth's department of sociology;

- Ruskin College Oxford's programme in International Labour and Trade Union Studies, grounded in radical adult education and trade union studies.

If we were to add to these a sampling of the various funders (in particular the European Research Council and the various national research councils) or the various journals mentioned above, we would certainly see some dimensions of difference more strongly expressed, given the nature of the gatekeeping activities involved in awarding funding or publishing.

Nonetheless it is clear that there is a substantial overlap in participation across these journals, and strong institutional pressures in this direction (the expectation of publishing in multiple journals "in the field"). When we move to the various social movements research networks (Council for European Studies social movements network, International Sociological Association RC47, European Sociological Association RC25, European Consortium for Political Research standing group on Participation and Mobilisation, national networks and so on) the gatekeeping pressures are usually very low and the variety is considerable. The CES network's directory of members' research, the largest single directory of social movements researchers on Europe until 2016 when it was abandoned for reasons of data protection, illustrated this diversity very well and its relationship to low levels of active gatekeeping (members had to be researching social movements in Europe and at least at graduate level, but within any discipline and any country).

Another way of putting this relationship is to say that scholars make different kinds of decision for different purposes: organisational recruitment (including developing research networks, recruiting PhD students and accepting conference papers) has a tendency towards greater or lesser pluralism, while other kinds of gatekeeping (awarding research grants beyond PhD level, peer review for research and funding, staff appointments) tends to be considerably more closed. What we ourselves do in our own research, in terms of who we cite or what ideas we draw on probably has a mixture of the strategic-instrumental and the committed, but we need to keep all three processes (recruitment, closure, ideas) in mind to understand how these things work.

Intellectual history: the different forces shaping social movement research cross-nationally

Before turning to normative-intellectual questions about how we relate to the fact of diversity, I want to explore the obvious question from the sociology of knowledge, or intellectual history: how can we understand this variety and explain its persistence?

Firstly, movements have come to be researched differently in different societies. We might contrast, for example, the "origin myth" of the development of US social movement studies in particular (Cox L. and Flesher Fominaya C., 2013) with how the study of movements in postcolonial societies more commonly takes place in fields such as history, literature and subaltern studies (Cox L., 2016). Fillieule O. and Accornero G.'s (2016) collection makes it clear that the encounter between endogenous Marxist understandings of movements within the academy and what might be called the US-EU export-import form of social movement studies is highly relevant in some countries, and not at all in others. This is without considering the differing extent to which post-1968 developments in different national university and research systems have seen the study of movements more commonly carried out within cultural studies, feminist, Foucauldian etc. frameworks of theory and methodology.

Clearly such conditions of existence shape not only how individual researchers arrive at a particular approach to researching movements, but also what kinds of institutional centre are possible: who has to be satisfied of an approach's legitimacy in order to make it take on a lasting shape? In some rare contexts, even in these latter days, it is possible for like-minded researchers to find themselves within the same institution, or to coalesce around a journal or conference – though the like-mindedness then needs to be explained in

terms of wider external forces. More commonly it is important to convince powerful others whose support is needed for significant institutional developments (major academic funding bodies, trade unions, university managers, academic barons) of the value of a particular approach in terms of various explicit and implicit criteria. There is also of course a distinction between shorter-lived initiatives tied to project funding and longer-lasting centres, journals and conferences which naturally have a more complex life history as they continue in operation.

Here we are not necessarily primarily talking about theoretical orthodoxies in any simple sense; for example, Pleyers G. and Capitaine B. (2016), like Cousin O. and Rui S. (2010) on CADIS, stress the theoretical plurality of even well-established institutions. It is rather a question of the broad problematics, methodologies and epistemologies which are encouraged, as well as of the overall doxa of particular disciplines in terms of what the gatekeepers of funding, PhDs, publications, careers etc. will accept as legitimate.

There are also of course significant material constraints. Cousin and Rui make clear the difficulties faced by PhD students in carrying out sociological intervention, but it is also hard to imagine extensive sociological intervention in a classic sense carried out by British or Irish teacher-researchers under most circumstances (for example, Peillon, M. 1982 adopts Touraine, A.'s (1981) theoretical perspective to analyse Irish society but does so on the basis of secondary literature rather than the methods of sociological intervention).

Lastly it is of course also a question of how social movements themselves impact our fields, for example in terms of student motivations, new researchers' focus of interest, normative concerns etc. but also indirectly, via the effect of Marxism, feminism, Black studies, GLTBQI studies, disability studies, postcolonial studies, subaltern studies and so on. This is of course also true for other political features such as the need to respond to right-wing movements, the concern to defend a liberal public space etc. Less positively, increasingly authoritarian governments and intolerant public spheres can also mean that actual or perceived engagement with movements, or publishing perspectives which are seen to have political implications, can be a very risky activity. Turkey, India, Egypt, Russia and East and Central Europe are all cases where researchers cannot

pretend to have the luxury of pursuing research on movements unconstrained by considerations of the potential consequences.

A typology of approaches to social movement research

The following provisional typology may help to clarify some of the dimensions of variation.

One dimension is *institutional*, on a broadly horizontal vs vertical schema: in one kind of academic system, researchers who share a common approach whatever their level can come together and agree to construct something which then has little difficulty gaining institutional approval. At the other extreme are strongly top-down systems, whether shaped by baronial approaches, funding-driven institutionalisation or managerialism. This institutional dimension impacts on what the decisive arguments are in constructing and maintaining academic institutions of different kinds (research centres, PhD and taught MA programmes, journals and conferences, etc.).

A second dimension is *disciplinary*, in terms of what is perceived as legitimate within particular disciplines (or for cross-disciplinary work), and what kinds of outcomes are decisive in asserting the legitimacy of a new approach. At one extreme are "essentially contested" disciplines where the construction of new networks etc. is a viable strategy for advancing an intellectual project; at the other are "centripetal" contexts where the successful assertion of a new project's coherence with existing disciplinary orthodoxies is decisive. It is worth noting that the same discipline (e.g. sociology or history) can operate very differently in different national contexts in this respect.

A third dimension is the relationship between social movement studies and the *wider society*. This could be theorised in terms of M. Burawoy's (2005) typology of public sociology. The spectrum runs from one where the scholar is fundamentally an elite figure in their professional activity to one where they operate in a world close to that of movement participants. This is of course also shaped by age, biography and institutional issues (in the US, for example, a full professor in an Ivy League institution is in a very different situation to adjunct faculty in a teaching college). Another way of phrasing this is to ask whether in a given society experienced scholars can be legitimately public intellectuals or experts (or neither) from

the viewpoint of mainstream media, policy-makers and intermediate spaces such as national academies, middle-brow reviews, etc. Actual movement participation may be more or less welcome and more or less constrained, both from the academic side and in terms of movements' reception of researchers and what is perceived as legitimate.

A further dimension is the extent to which, in particular societies and particular movements, substantial *movement-related intellectual institutions* (in the sense of not being ultimately reliant on academic authorisation) can be said to exist, and the ways in which these interface with (a) the practice of research, (b) theoretical developments and (c) the social concerns of academic disciplines. Marxism is an obvious case in point here, in that some societies (but not all) have more or less extensive independent Marxist education and research institutions, with a very wide range of relationships to academic activity.

Finally we need to consider the dimension of *intellectual competition*: how far do multiple disciplines and intellectual traditions (a) lay claim to the field of collective action, more or less successfully, and (b) engage in dialogue with one another in this respect? And how far do they engage in dialogue with movement-based theories and issues (this may of course be a discussion *within* e.g. Marxism or feminism, ecology or GLTBQI thought as between academic and movement exponents)?

This – very provisional - typology is intended to help a move towards a comparative history of ideas, underlining the social conditions of existence of particular approaches to social movement research within the academy. It also thematises the relationship between academic knowledge, practitioner knowledge and public knowledge of social movements, not only in theoretical terms but perhaps more strongly in terms of methodological assumptions as to the nature of such knowledge (for example: objective, pragmatic and normative).

As I stress in the next section, a sociology of knowledge approach does not exclude recognising the constitutive necessity for active researchers to commit at least provisionally to a specific local approach, at the same time as having relationships both of recognition and of non-recognition with other approaches, other disciplines or other nationally-based models. I want to suggest that this is in fact the key intellectual challenge which we are forced to engage with in practice (to a greater or lesser extent) but which we can benefit from reflecting on more explicitly.

Reflections: normative intellectual questions

The questions raised in 1.2 above are different methodological approaches to the same broad sociology of knowledge question, which can now be stated more precisely: how, in this metaphorically multi-lingual situation, can we (firstly) construct a genuine conversation that is not simply a prisoner of the specific national, disciplinary etc. contexts within which *funded* research and *salaried* researchers exist – and (secondly) work towards an acceptance of diversity without (thirdly) abandoning any sense of intellectual value or for that matter normative significance?

Here I am assuming that we do not simply want to allow our intellectual norms to be dictated by what happens to constitute orthodoxy in a particular time and place without reflection, whether that means to abandoning judgement on what constitutes good social movements research either to the globally dominant conversation that is the US subdiscipline of social movement studies or to the locally powerful set of relationships that is the EU's research funding processes in the area. This is, of course, different from consciously judging that either the substance of these approaches or individuals and institutions involved in their social infrastructure are those from which we should take our intellectual lead.

However, if we do not ourselves hold the kind of academic power to be involved in shaping such processes, we are then also by definition in no position to impose our own scholarly norms unilaterally beyond the level of a research programme, a journal or conference which we ourselves control – and which in any case we would typically have to justify in other terms: to funders, colleagues, university authorities and so on. Thus some form of co-existence is a fact of life for those of us who wish to engage beyond our own provincial situation (and here I am reading both the US subdiscipline and EU funding processes as provincial, albeit powerfully so), along with the commitment we necessarily adopt (at least for any given purpose) to a more specific approach.

At the same time, I take it that we do not wish to see co-existence mean that we simply interpret what exists as being good by the simple virtue of existing. At some level we seek an intellectual conversation, and a systematisation of how knowledge is generated which can legitimately be called science – indeed, perhaps more legitimately so than one which takes the practice of a particular discipline as it is carried out within a given local institutional setting as ultimately defining of intellectual value. So the attempt to construct such a conversation through the identification of shared points of intellectual reference, even if not central to our own practice; the systematic development of ideas and logical argument, even if we do not always start from the same presuppositions; and the careful attempt to clarify empirical realities, even if those we engage with are not of the same order – these all remain important, and it is here that a more careful specification of the sociology of knowledge shaping our own work is useful.

Furthermore, it becomes empirically evident once one seeks employment outside of the most obvious local possibilities (or supports junior scholars in their own efforts) that social movement studies often has to argue for its right to exist, and that in Europe in particular the argument is far from being accepted. Full-time social movement researchers are a far rarer breed in Europe than many other kinds of researchers, and for this reason we often find ourselves highlighting in different ways the specific real-world significance of what we do, without (hopefully) wishing to reduce our research to what is instrumentally valuable for elites. This is a more sensitive and perhaps "essentially contested" area, and as we shall see different kinds of argument are accepted as being valuable in different national contexts – whether in terms of publishing books whose readership goes beyond a specific academic niche, being in demand from the commercial media or valued online resources such as OpenDemocracy, being able to speak to or collaborate with movement actors or for that matter relevant kinds of policy maker, or (for those of us in countries where research institutes such as the FMSH do not exist) showing undergraduates why social movements matter in the first place.

For our own scholarly practice, then, it may be useful to draw on de Sousa Santos' (2006) "ecology of knowledges" metaphor. How can we better understand where one another is coming from intellectually and learn from that, while developing (non-managerial) ways of raising the level of the conversation? These are of course classic interdisciplinary questions.

Here I offer the example of the peer review process on *Interface*, not as a model to be followed but as one which explicitly thematises these various dimensions.

Firstly, we insist on separate, autonomous editorial groups for each region of the world (and one for transnational movements) rather than impose a metropolitan definition of "what matters" for movements globally and how to approach it. Positively, this means actively seeking an openness to the forms of movement theory that are particularly salient in different regions. If not yet "a sociology of the global South" (Connell R. 2007, Bhambra G. 2007), this is at least an institutional structure intended to enable the articulation of a "social movement studies of Latin America", or Africa, or South Asia.

Secondly, in peer review we seek one researcher to assess a piece from an academic perspective and one movement practitioner to assess its relevance to participants. Of course both of these can have many different dimensions and the corresponding editor is thus the final arbiter. This follows from the journal's self-definition as a practitioner journal on a model familiar from many other disciplines.

Normally we then hope to find both a congruence with the empirical experience of the movement *in situ* (and not simply its international reception, which can be a very different thing where a movement has become symbolic in international discourse) and that the piece is good of its kind within a particular scholarly or intellectual approach.

Hence it could be said that we are not attempting to prescribe *a priori* what disciplines, research methods, theoretical approaches or political / intellectual traditions are valid, but rather to create the space for a qualitative judgement on this, taking account of the intellectual landscape of a particular region (or in relation to a given movement etc.) Within this, we are then asking how well the piece meets the *internal* standards of that approach.

Lastly we are asking how well the piece is able to speak etically, outside of this particular discourse, to others who are interested in thinking about social movement in whatever form.

As noted, I am not proposing these as universal standards for social movement research, but rather noting that these explicitly thematise some of the dimensions of research noted above.

A social movement studies of the global South?

It becomes clear immediately if we look at actually-existing forms of the study of social movements in different parts of the majority world that there is no *one* social movement studies of the global South, *pace* S. Fadaee's (2016) suggestive collection. However – and importantly – characteristic of what exists is a much closer relationship to struggle. To take three examples, in South Africa we have UHURU's focus on human emancipation and popular struggle (M. Neocosmos n.d.), contrasting with, for example, the more statist approaches of the Centre for Civil Society or Peter Alexander's Research Chair in Social Change. In India we can point to a contrast between the academically-based and primarily historical and national focus of the Subaltern Studies school (Nilsen A. and Roy S. 2015) and the movement-linked approaches of CACIM, itself closely associated with the World Social Forum discussion processes (Sen J. and Waterman P. 2007)). In Mexico the school of graduate sociology at the Universidad Autónoma de Puebla would seem in textual terms to be pursuing a very different strategy to the Zapatistas' intellectual rhetoric (contrast Holloway J. 2002 with Marcos 2001), but in practice there are considerable affinities.

Hence the questions around a social movement studies of the global South, or the post-colonial world, or the non-European world, would have to be "What are the historical presuppositions underlying social movement studies as an institutional reality in different contexts? How far can these presuppositions be usefully relativised by a more global perspective? And what key dimensions of tension would that perspective identify?"

In my attempt to distinguish the primarily US-based history of what I have called canonical social movement studies from the actually-existing history of research on social movements in Europe, one obvious dimension of difference is the extent to which the US-based history is primarily the history of endogenous developments within a small number of academic fields, responding no doubt to the wider world but not, as a discipline, affecting the outer world to anything like the same extent. Conversely, it might be said, a key feature of much European research on movements in the postwar decades, and perhaps again today, is a different kind of relationship between movements, states and universities, in which the relatively weaker field of movement research responds to developments within movements and their interaction with the state.

Ireland, as a post-colonial state, is different again (Cox L. 2016). What we find here is an intellectual tradition within which the disciplines of history and literature were central to the articulation of a narrative of the nation as agent, and hence also of a wide variety of social movements, but within very different intellectual frameworks. Over 90 years after independence this same broad pattern remains as one core thread of research on social movements. Within sociology and associated fields, there is a pattern of research on contemporary social movements of a semi-institutionalised kind (e.g. feminism, GLTBQ movements, environmentalism); often this research has more or less explicitly policy-related interests. Meanwhile, strong Marxist traditions outside the academy associated with left parties, trade unions and independent critical thought contribute to academic research on these same dimensions of working-class movements; while adult education, applied social studies etc. see the presence of substantial bodies of theory tied to community-based activism of various kinds.

In other words, in the Irish context there is usually a relatively clear link between individual disciplines, privileging the study of specific movements, with a more or less visible political purpose, whether in relation to the legitimacy of the nation-state (and Northern Irish politics), social movements as policy actors, the political articulation of left organising or the training of community activists. My assumption in this paper is not that this pattern will prove to hold for other postcolonial states in any simple way, but rather that similar questions as to the political purpose (with a small or large P) of different intellectual / disciplinary projects can usefully be asked.

At the broadest level, and now including "Western" approaches, the expectation is that different relationships to *social action* are more or less embedded within the nature of different research institutions, not least in their different intellectual problematics, their methodological approaches and epistemological presuppositions. We can perhaps use this as a means of grasping the multiplicity of different national situations in terms of the role of the university or of research, types of relationship between academia and social movements, and forms of theory.

This takes us away from a simplistic narrative of "science" and "ideology, "objectivity" and "bias", towards deeper questions of knowledge production and research methodology; in other words questions of what it is we do *practically and socially* when we act as scientists, how we *justify and define* this activity (or aspects of it) as being scientific, and how this works differently in different contexts. At another level again, it raises important questions about the nature of knowledge, and here I want to turn briefly to Aristotle.

Aristotle and social movements

Aristotle's conception of knowledge is complex and not entirely consistent (Aristotle *Nichomachean Ethics* Book VI, Parry R. 2007, Mrvica A. and Sides C. 2007). I am not, here, attempting to adopt it for the study of social movements so much as to use it by analogy to reflect on knowledge and movements. In one possible reading, Aristotle distinguishes between true knowledge – not "science" as we now understand it in experimental terms but that which is necessarily true, as with some forms of mathematics; craft (*technè*), as an instrumental or productive kind of knowledge which involves a general understanding of the objects with which it works in order to effect some sort of change; and *phronesis*, as a form of self-knowledge which has to do with ethical action and wisdom among other things (excluding an instrumental-productive relationship).

We can, perhaps, glimpse here some of the reasons why the *active* type of knowledge associated with movements is challenging to what Gramsci would call a purely *contemplative* type of knowledge that might be considered to be "scientific" and associated with structure alone. Insofar as the study of movements is a sociology of action, we cannot divorce this from actors' own understandings, which – as in sociological intervention but not only there – appear not as fixed (as in some culturalist approaches) but rather subject both to learning and to contestation (de Smet 2015). An adequate understanding of movements cannot avoid engaging with this particular challenge.

However, we might also want to think (perhaps with G. Pleyers' 2010 distinction between instrumental and expressive emphases in social movements) that movement knowledge might in turn vary in its proportions of *technè* (craft, instrumental knowledge) or *phronesis* (prudence, action which is good in itself), and indeed that the tension between these two may be constitutive of certain types of movement, or that particular political paths may result from how this tension is resolved.

This is not, I think, to say that the study of social movements *must* be engaged – although I have argued that on other grounds elsewhere. Here it is to say rather that – just as with anthropology – the credible study of movements must involve a certain capacity to recognise this position of the actor, as craftsperson or prudent, which one masters best by taking up that position oneself, whether in movement engagement or in reflection on one's own instrumental or prudent actor position in other contexts.

Implications

How does this matter, and what questions does it open for discussion?

Firstly, what are the implications for us as social movement researchers in terms of the strategic choices we make over time as to what to research and how, where to present our research and what intellectual questions to pursue, and how we position ourselves vis-à-vis specific academic institutions, social movements and other social and political actors? Why do we make the choices we do in this respect and how conscious are we of doing so?

Secondly, does it even make sense to think of a global "social movement studies", as something distinct both from other ways of conceptualising collective agency within sociology as much as within other academic disciplines? If we can do this, on the basis of the actually-existing diversity of approaches, what would practically constitute a global social movement studies *beyond* the

obvious empirical realities of (for example) journals, scholarly networks, translations of high-profile works or scholarly citation practices?

Finally, why and how do social movements matter – in the world, for the social sciences, for us personally? What makes them worthwhile subjects of study? How can we move from an attitude of boredom or of professional indifference to one in which what we do really matters?

In the remainder of this project I aim to go deeper into the first and second of these questions. However this working paper concludes with some at least provisional answers to the third.

Envoi: why social movement studies (still) matter

"Objective" social needs imply a social referent

Academic commentary on the needs of the future routinely *implies* a social referent, while equally routinely struggling to articulate what that social referent might look like in practice. To take three of thousands of possible examples:

Yuan Tseh Lee's commentary on *Future Earth*:

> "if the knowledge doesn't connect with action, we can do all the research in the world, and it won't make nearly enough of a difference" (Lee Y. T., 2015: 25)

Andreas Ytterstad on the prospects for finding popular support for environmental sustainability:

> "The task is a formidable one, but it is also realistic – if we mobilise and fight together for new climate jobs and green workplaces." (Ytterstad A., 2013 : 14).

The International Panel on Social Progress:

> "Il existe des opportunités considérables d'améliorer la condition humaine, presque partout dans le monde. Il est possible d'éradiquer la pauvreté tout en préservant l'environnement, de rendre l'Etat-providence viable en s'attaquant aux inégalités primaires, de libérer la politique des pressions financières et de démocratiser les décisions économiques qui déterminent le sort des populations. Réaliser ces opportunités suppose toutefois de trouver un chemin et de vaincre des obstacles et des résistances considérables. Nous croyons

qu'offrir aux acteurs et citoyens une vision des possibilités peut contribuer à l'émergence d'une dynamique porteuse de progrès social"[2].

In each of these cases – and many others like them – the challenge is not so much to bridge the objective and the normative as to bridge the gulf between analysis and action. There is of course a certain rhetorical naïveté in simply attempting to bridge this gulf via the public or academic dissemination of what is in any case already known to those who pay attention to such things. As in the case of climate change, routine debate is not enough (or rather it responds to that form of liberalism for which the *means* – "a great debate" etc. – justifies the *end*).

Social movements play a central role in moving beyond the intellectual full stop of declaring what needs to be done while being unable to articulate any possible agency beyond one's own routine work of dissemination along existing channels. This is not to say that they are the only such forces, but without movements the kinds of normative scholarly arguments identified above fail to identify sociologically credible carriers of their own programmes.

In this respect, social movement studies is about nothing less than the question of the social actors which may be able to offer some hope for the survival of our species, and our planet, in other than disastrous conditions. As social movement researchers we should, perhaps, be less coy about stating this fact – and less narrow in our own concerns.

We are in a period of intensifying conflict, and understanding movements is more important than ever before

As we enter what A. Nilsen and I (2014) have called the twilight of neoliberalism, we see a widespread breakdown of the routines and relationships which characterised the period of more or less stable neoliberal operations. At a fairly fundamental level for the survival of the species, we see an intensification of conflicts around climate change and its denial. New methods of petroleum extraction and correspondingly contentious transport (massive pipeline projects) represent in part the tendential exhaustion of earlier and more

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2. http://lautjournal.info/20160602/manifeste-pour-le-progres-social

accessible deposits, while global policy conflicts between fossil and renewable fuels make it clear that the period in which states automatically took the side of the oil industry as the only (strategic, economically viable) game in town is now coming to an end. Conflicts around airport expansion represent another aspect in which the current industrial model is once again (following the conflicts of the late 1970s and early 1980s over nuclear power) increasingly being placed in question by social movements.

Globally, we are seeing an intensification of "anarchy" in international relations, with once-obedient client states pushing authoritarianism as far as they can, including in relation to social movement researchers in countries like Egypt, Turkey and India. We are seeing "bad movements" (such as pro- and anti-Islamist violence, often mediated through states and quasi-states) as well as large-scale peace movements setting effective limits to western military adventures in MENA and elsewhere.

Within Europe, we see the juxtaposition of a resurgent right-wing populism, primarily in core states (e.g. AfD, Calais, anti-immigrant violence), with a broadly progressive resistance to the EU and associated austerity programmes, primarily in peripheral countries (Iceland, Spain, Greece, Portugal, Ireland). In the Anglophone world the experiences shaped around Trump and Brexit, Corbyn and Sanders represent similar tendencies of a rapid reshaping of political forces and alliances and a search for stable and effective forms of ensuring popular consent for new kinds of political project.

More broadly, it might be said that there is an ongoing series of uprisings and transformations where it appears that neither the old order can hold nor can something new successfully impose itself (e.g. Black Lives Matter, Trump and women's mobilising in the US; Nuit Debout, the state of emergency, *banlieu* riots and the presidential election in France; Egypt's political travails since 2011; the Gezi movement and Erdogan's counter-coup…).

In such periods it is precisely through *movement* and collective action (including collective action from above, or in alliance with the powerful) that the needs of the present are articulated – in deformed or transparent forms – and the potential of the future is articulated. I take it that this is part of the original vision of sociological intervention (that social movements represent something wider than themselves) and indeed part of the intellectual justification for studying movements in general, or for social movement studies to be something more than a minor and self-referential academic field. If there was a falling away from this larger vision in a period when movement seemed off the agenda it is clear that it is now back on the agenda. In this context social movement studies is looking at one of, if not the, most decisive actors in the conflicts currently shaping global futures.

Our potential as social movement researchers

As movement researchers, then, we are engaging with something which can at times represent both a objective referent of what present-day society can be said to need in a general sense *and* a key actor in the conflicts which express the needs of individuals and shape the future. I take it that some sense of this underlies both our work as researchers and our engagement in movements, when we are also engaged in this way.

I do not think that we should be ashamed of this; in fact we should find ways to articulate this clearly vis-à-vis our academic colleagues who prefer to describe and analyse structures in isolation from collective human action, but also vis-à-vis our interlocutors in movements who often value our recognition of the significance of what they are doing and the stakes they are fighting for. In fact in doing this we contribute both to a less parochial sense of science in which social movements are somehow unserious flourishes as against the profound theorisations of structure or concept – and to helping movement actors see themselves and their action more clearly.

In our work as researchers, but also as public intellectuals, movement interlocutors, teachers, supervisors and the like we can contribute in what I take to be a Tourainean way to helping movement actors understand more clearly the meanings of their action and reflect more systematically on their strategies. I think this is perhaps better than either finding theoretical ways of eternalising the world as it is (in a period of profound historical change) - or making faint calls for people to abjure sin and behave well without reflection on what that process actually means in

practice, in the face of determined and powerful opponents.

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