
Call for Papers International conference

**Contested Democracy: contestation and participation in the English-speaking world. A critical evaluation
20-22 September 2012**

CREW (EA 4399), Institut du Monde Anglophone, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris 3

The dissent and uprisings that spread through the Arab world during the Spring of 2011 occurred almost a quarter of a century after the fall of East European political régimes that saw the rise of "democracy" modeled on the Anglo-American representative system. This specific context which has come to characterize the past quarter of century calls for a renewed analysis of the models these political systems represent and of the processes that triggered them and led to their long-term establishment in the UK and the US. Since the 1990s, as a response to the story of the inevitable emergence of democracy in the aftermath of the Cold War, researchers on North American politics have provided an alternative reading of events: that of a "contested democracy". The CREW Paris-based research group is organising an international conference in order to reflect on the notion of a "contested democracy" and its role in the understanding of democracy as theory and practice. In inviting to a critical evaluation of this now commonly used phrase, the conference wishes to open up onto a wide-range of approaches and discourses relating to democracy in the English-speaking world, from individual expression to collective action, from infra-political practices to more explicit forms of dissent, from within political organisations or large-scale social movements, including local democracy and debates on community-building and social cohesion. This conference is aimed at specialists on the Anglo-American world (and beyond, on the English-speaking world) who are interested in these questions from either an historical or contemporary perspective. The purpose of this conference is to encourage comparative analysis on participation, contest and contestation, as well as on phenomena such as adaptation and self-appropriation which characterise the exchange and transfer of ideas that can be observed in the different national contexts of the English-speaking world.

When popularising the notion of "contested democracy", historians and political scientists have attempted to underline the way that democratic progress and the resulting democratic structures have been borne of often fiercely fought battles. Its establishment has been the result of a jerky evolution beset by setbacks and victories, rather than a smooth and incremental evolution towards (presumed) democracy. The emphasis has thus been laid on the pluralism of a liberal system where successive claims and demands from the "excluded" within civil society have highlighted their rights to be included and to participate. Here "contest", rather than contestation from the outside is understood as competition among rival interests, a contest which has become the very vector for the emergence of a pluralist system to which individuals and groups gravitate (Jürgen Habermas).

Whilst this is the main meaning of the phrase "contested democracy", we may reflect more widely on how contestation has been expressed and continues to be articulated within a dominant political model. Beyond the classic expressions of contestation and dissent, such as demonstrations, revolutions and civil disobedience, there are many other forms emanating from the public realm and from civil society as a whole, which aim to reinvent the very notion of democracy. The area of study for the conference need not be limited to the traditional opposition between "the street " and "the rulers", although the events of the Arab Spring clearly invite us to rethink this relationship. It would also be interesting to deal with attempts made by political regimes to preempt contest or contestation via consultative mechanisms or local partnerships, as was the case for example in the UK during the New Labour governments. Furthermore, the realm of private contestation can include the business world and alternative participation made accessible by digital communication. By definition, the notion of "contested democracy" invites us to consider participation and contestation in conjunction, and to envisage forms of "counter democracy" (Pierre Rosanvallon), borne of defiance towards so-called democratic structures without which the very existence of a community is endangered. In this way, depending on the context and the usage, new technologies and the new structures they are associated with can become either tools for contestation or instruments for social cohesion.

The conference aims at providing an overview and assessment of current research on new and innovative forms of participation in the English-speaking world, both in the contemporary period and in history, with an emphasis on alternative and critical approaches to power.

In this exploration of the meaning and practice of “contested democracy”, possible fields to be addressed, from either a historical or contemporary vantage point:

- local sphere, civil society
- political parties, social movements, associations
- communications, networks, new social media
- cultural diversity, identity politics and mobilisation
- governance and influence of public-private actors ...

Please send a one-page proposal and a short bio-bibliography to:

Emmanuelle Avril & Naomi Wulf at: Contested-democracy@univ-paris3.fr before December 10, 2011.

Confirmation will be given by February 15, 2012.

Scientific committee

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The conference webpage: www.univ-paris3.fr/contested-democracy