SOUTH ASIA FROM THE LENS OF STUDENT POLITICS
SAMAJ: Call for Special Issue Papers and Seminar

Guest editors and seminar conveners: Jean-Thomas Martelli (CERI, Sciences Po Paris), Kristina Garalytė (The Center of Oriental Studies, Vilnius University)

Studies on student movements in various countries acknowledge the leading role taken by elite universities in the social sciences (Altbach 1991; Zhao 2004; Luescher-Mamashela 2016; Ketchley and Biggs 2016). Simultaneously, in the West sections of students do address the neoliberal turn in higher education which promote the introduction of tuition fees as well as cuts to public funding (Della Porta, forthcoming). While these trends may also hold true in the South Asian context (Martelli 2017), a variety of social movements in the region, revolving around both material and identity issues have also been fuelled by marginalised sections of the educated youth (Garalytė 2016), thus corroborating the evidence of a plebeian upsurge in South Asian politics (Varshney 2000).

Thirty years after the last major scholarly account on student politics in South Asia (Hazary 1987), the seminar will explore the specificity of everyday student and youth politics in the subcontinent. The seminar will re-examine the validity of the claim that student politics entered in cycles of ideological depoliticisation in the post-independence context (Shah 2004). Participants will also engage with the argument that student politics serves as a spring board for prospective political leadership (Altbach 1970, 1992), making universities hotbeds of party and muscle politics (Ruud 2010) and places for the reproduction of various forms of dominance (Jeffrey 2010). Importantly, the seminar will aim at better understanding how student politics negotiate questions of gender, caste, language, ethnicity, community and class identities.

From a theoretical standpoint, the seminar will focus on South Asian universities as places of “contentious politics” (Tilly 2006) and “agonistic pluralism” (Mouffe 1999, 2013), where peaceful demonstrations go hand in hand with political violence and where students mobilise and negotiate divides on social, economic and status lines. While acknowledging the importance of demographic factors of the family in shaping students’ political endeavours (Kumar 2014), the seminar will also examine the relevance of specific campus-based cultures as distinct political phenomena.

All in all, the papers in the seminar will address a broad range of research questions through acknowledging the regional and national variability of movements across Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. On what issues and identities students mobilise in South Asia? What is the visibility and influence of student politics on society and political process? To which extent student politics is tied to party politics and broader socio-political networks? What means and methods of mobilisation are employed by student activists? How student politics is affected by and reacts to neo-liberalism, consumerism and globalisation?

The seminar will provide a platform for scholars conducting empirical research on student and youth politics and will seek to better understand student and youth politics in a larger comparative perspective. Depending on interest and on the consistency and quality of contributions, selected papers from participants will be submitted for publication as part of a special issue in SAMAJ. The seminar will be organised in October 2018 at the School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS), Paris. Please send your abstract by April 1st 2018.