Seeing Politics through Intermediation and Intermediaries

Call for papers

One day Conference

13 December 2019, Paris

EHess - CEias

This seminar proposes to look at politics through the lens of political intermediaries and what they do, i.e. intermediation. Intermediaries can be defined as an assorted group of actors (political brokers, political parties, interest groups, movements) who acts as a hinge between two or more levels, actors or social institutions; while intermediation, as a process, encompasses all the mediations that these actors perform in order to keep the political system intact (Zaremberg, Guarneros-Meza, and Lavalle 2017; Gunther, Puhle, and Montero 2007; Kitschelt 2004; Smith 2007). The question we are interested in relates to the transformations in the roles of these agents and processes of mediation since the neo-liberal transformation has engulfed the processes of public policy formulation, contestation and enactment.

We want to knit the streams of inquiries around three main themes, namely a) Practices, Forms and Ends of intermediations b) Means and Rationalities of Intermediation c) Intermediation looking for a Comparative Framework. Contributions are welcome on any or all of these themes and sub-themes.

Theme 1 # Practices, Actors and Ends of intermediations

Public policy in its formulation and implementation is a hotly contested subject. Intermediaries mediate all these contestations in different fields and sectors. These acts and practices of intermediation are diverse, multilevel, multiform and so are the actors engaged in them. Just to mention South Asian literature, brokerage, fixing and clientelism are described as forms of intermediations (Reddy and Haragopal 1985; Inbanathan 2003; Berenschot 2010, 2011; Manor 2000). Similarly, the practices of interest groups in Brussels can also be treated as intermediation (Smith 2007; Bernhagen and Rose 2010) while local community organizations are seen as involved in intermediation in Latin America (Zaremberg, Guarneros-Meza, and Lavalle 2017).

Why is the presence of such actors increasing? Some authors consider poverty, patronage informality and inequality as contributing factors (Chandra 2004; Mohmand 2008; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). However, increasingly informality (a character of patronage democracies) is also noted in so-called advanced democracies (Jaffe and Koster 2019; Bernhagen and Rose 2010). Some have argued that neo-liberal governmentalization might have increased the need and utility for intermediaries (Corbridge et al. 2005; Sending and Neumann 2006).

But what ends these actors serve? They effectively shape governance (Blundo and Meur 2008; Inbanathan 2003); develop forms of accountability and citizenship (Berenschot 2019); and
colonize the *enactment* of public policy (Harriss-White 2003). Again, the multiplicity of ends correlates with their modes of engagement.

Contributions empirically dealing with these (or similar) questions/themes are welcome here:

- Studying political change through intermediaries
- Locality, social power and political intermediaries the interrelations
- Policy, politics, public delivery and multiple roles that intermediaries perform at different scales of these processes.

**Theme 2 # Meanings of Intermediation and Rationalities of Intermediaries**

Here we seek to stimulate proposals that analyze the meanings and rationalities involved in the diversity of existing mediations. These meanings and rationalities are often used by the agents of mediation to legitimize a given social order. Mediation processes, although they include forms of adaptability of the mediators to diverse situations, are also determined by the contents at stake in this mediation. These contents may refer, for example, to the use of changing identities that intermediaries assume to connect different cultural realities. Such connections, as shown by historical studies, may seek to make visible certain sections of society in the national reality (Guerrero 1997); or they may serve for the construction of emerging identities to reconcile contradictory interests (Yannakakis 2008). The senses and rationalities of which we speak can also be expressed in particular forms of ritual expression that include normative roles of patronage both divine and human and that serve as vehicles of mediation between different fragments of society, for instance, linking the profane with the sacred (Manglos 2011; Piliavsky 2015).

Other forms of mediation, very recurrent in the present time, are those that include diverse aesthetic manifestations that exalt the popular culture. These aesthetic expressions, administered by specific brokers, are functional to the maintenance of one or another social structure where the use of specific forms and styles to represent cultural forms are at stake (Kurin 1997; Braester 2005; Jaffe 2012). By constructing a dynamic idea of what memory is, events and political processes of the past are continuously being used as the raw material of mediation between despaired identities. In this context we can also consider history as a content of cultural mediation (Shaw 2002; Nugent 2008).

Proposals derived from empirical analysis on the following topics will be welcomed in this theme:

- What symbolic and cultural resources do intermediaries use to connect different social realities?
- What imaginaries (secular, religious) they create/produce while engaged in mediation?
- Dynamic and multilocal identities of intermediaries
- Polymorphous and localized meanings attached with practices of mediations

**Theme 3 # Looking for a Comparative Framework**

As we have discussed above, similar processes are evidently present across all cultural and political divides. Anthropologists (Lindquist 2015) and political scientists (Hilgers 2011) have a long history of engagement with such concepts and themes we call *intermediation* (Wolf
The multiplicity of these actors and their roles asks for an encompassing theoretical approach and develop methodological tools to contribute to the studies of intermediation and intermediaries.

Proposals seeking to answer the following questions are welcome:

- Can there be a synthetic interdisciplinary framework to conceptualize and theorize these processes (intermediation) in a comparative manner?
- Political intermediation and political representation, looking for a synthesis?
- Brokerage, clientelism and patronage, what could interdisciplinary approaches offer to reduce conceptual overstretching and overlapping?
- How could Intermediation be useful in comprehending the diffused nature of political mobilization, representation and institution building?

**Deadlines**

Interested PhD candidates, postdoctoral fellows or scholars are invited to submit an abstract of maximum 500 words in English or French to intermediation2019@gmail.com by September 15th, 2019. Successful applicants will be informed by October 20th. Final papers of a maximum of 8 000 words should be submitted by November 8th.

**More information:** [http://divergencelab.org](http://divergencelab.org)

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**With the support of:**
Doctorat - Territoires, sociétés, développement - EHESS
Centre d'Études de l'Inde et de l'Asie du Sud (CEIAS)
Association Divergence

**Bibliography**


Mohmand, Shandana Khan. 2008. “Local Government Reforms in Pakistan: Strengthening Social Capital or Rolling Back the State?” In Local Democracy in South Asia:


