

---

*Sabrina Zajak*

## A Political Economic View of Social Movements

### New Perspectives and Open Questions

#### ABSTRACT

This article responds to recent calls for bringing capitalism back into the study of social movement research. It goes beyond a Marxian class-based analysis of capitalism and introduces a broader institutional political economic perspective on social movements. Instead of only trying to explain motivations and political orientations, this article takes the Polanyian idea of embeddedness as a starting point to discuss the role of social movements in the construction of institutions governing capitalism today. Those institutions are national and global. Accordingly, the relations between capitalist institutions and social movements can be analysed in the national context, transnationally and from a comparative perspective. The article provides some new theoretical lenses and opens up new research questions for future empirical investigations along these three dimensions. In sum the article proposes to take a closer look on social movements' role in the struggles between market creation and market regulation. Given the dominance of neoliberal ideology, despite continuous mobilisation for social justice and democracy, future research should pay particular attention to unintended consequences of social movements and the responses of economic elites to outside challenges, which help explain the strength and resilience of neoliberal capitalism.

Keywords: *political economy, social movements, Karl Polanyi, neoliberalism, varieties of capitalism (VOC)*

## 1. Social Movements, Capitalism, and Political Economy

It seems that Jeff Goodwin and Gabriel Hetland's recent call for bringing capitalism back into the study of social movements is beginning to carry fruits and scholars started to re-pay attention to the fact that social movements operate in capitalist societies.<sup>1</sup> In their 2013 article *The Strange Disappearance of Capitalism from Social Movement Studies* they ask the question of why capitalism has disappeared from the study of social movements.<sup>2</sup> They explain this disappearance with the low concern of research on new social movements with workplace issues and Marxist theories. The problem was that Marxist theories tend to overpredict radical working-class movements and movement scholars started to look for other variables (resources, strategies, opportunities) which seems to better fit to explain mobilisation.

I agree with their main argument that social movement research does suffer from a theoretical neglect of capitalism. This is a loss for social movement research as capitalism, as a basic social force structuring societies today, plays an important role for all kinds of social movements. Yet while these authors make an important contribution by bringing capitalism back into social movement research, they only focus on a particular understanding of the Marxian class-based version of capitalism, which looks at class as an explanatory factor for why movements adopt certain aims and political orientations. This article proposes to go beyond the questions of how class cleavage explains ideologies and orientations and introduces a political economic perspective on social movements. It argues that a political economy perspective, which understands capitalism as historic and context specific and as continuously changing set of institutions,<sup>3</sup> can contribute to re-situating and re-evaluating how social movements shape and get shaped by their political-economic context. In general, international political economy

[...] is the study of the interplay of economics and politics in the world's area. [...] For some, it refers to the study of the political basis of economic actions, the ways in

- 1 Colin Barker et al. (eds): *Marxism and Social Movements*, Leiden 2013.
- 2 Jeff Goodwin/Gabriel Hetland: *The Strange Disappearance of Capitalism from Social Movement Studies*, in: Colin Barker et al. (eds): *Marxism and Social Movements*, Leiden 2013, pp. 83–103.
- 3 Such a definition is provided for example by Wolfgang Streeck who understands capitalism “not as a self-driven mechanism of surplus extraction and accumulation governed by objective laws, but as a set of interrelated social institutions, and as a historically specific system of structured as well as structuring social interaction within and in relation to an institutionalized social order”, Wolfgang Streeck: *Taking Capitalism Seriously: Towards an Institutional Approach to Contemporary Political Economy*, in: *Socio Economic Review* 9:1 (2011), pp. 137–167, p. 138.

which government policies affect market operations. For others, the principal preoccupation is the economic basis of political action, the ways in which economic forces mould government policies. The two focuses are in a sense complementary, for politics and markets are in a constant state of mutual interaction.<sup>4</sup>

This definition has been extended by several authors who note that it is not only about the interaction of politics and economy but that it is also important to take into account the societal preconditions and how civil society actors influence and shape political-economic behavior. This understanding does not specifically acknowledge that social movements are part of the political basis of economic actions. Combining insights from both disciplines means bringing *contentious politics* into our understanding of capitalist societies.

A political economic perspective on social movements means on the one hand asking how capitalism structures social movement's interactions with its environment. On the other hand it means asking to what extent mobilisation and activism shapes the various institutions which govern our capitalist society and the inequalities they produce today. The first aspect has been at least partially covered by bringing capitalism back in, which shows how capitalism shapes movements ideologies, goals, tactics and collective identities.<sup>5</sup> Thus this article primarily focuses on the second aspect. In this regard, an International Political Economy (IPE) approach opens up three perspectives:

First, it resituates the debate on social movement consequences within the broader context of market-making and market-shaping regulation. In social movement research, social movement outcomes are primarily discussed in the much narrower context of the political consequences of social movements (stemming from the political process perspective). In contrast, the IPE perspective asks about the social movement contribution to balancing inequality in societies by taming capitalist forces in institutions. This is discussed as social movements' contribution to the regulation of the economy within states in section 2.1.

Second, one core insight of comparative research in political economy is that capitalism and the institutions governing it look different from country to country – this is a core insight of the varieties of capitalism (VOC) approach.<sup>6</sup> Comparative social movement studies have paid thorough attention to national differences between social movements and there are consequences explaining them with differences in the political

4 Jeffrey A. Frieden/David A. Lake: *International Political Economy: Perspectives on Global Power and Wealth*, New York 2002.

5 Jeff Goodwin/Gabriel Hetland: *The Strange Disappearance of Capitalism from Social Movement Studies*.

6 Peter A. Hall/David Soskice: *Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage*, Oxford et. al. 2001.

opportunity structures in different countries.<sup>7</sup> Yet, there is (almost) no link between the VOC approach and social movement literature.<sup>8</sup> Social movements in varieties of capitalism are summarised in section 2.1.

Third, capitalism is an (almost) global phenomenon. Political economy as such is rarely treated as a purely domestic phenomenon and is predominantly discussed as international political economy.<sup>9</sup> The constraints globalisation poses on nation-states, the emergence and development of global economic governance institutions and their effect on local political-economies and institutions are discussed. This line of research has hardly been acknowledged by social movement scholars. While research on transnational activism has increasingly recognised that social movements, advocacy networks and activists operate across borders, this shapes international politics and diffuses international norms. Discussions on how social movements resist and shape global economic governance are rare.<sup>10</sup> Social movements within the global political economy are discussed in section 2.3.

In sum, this article looks at social movements through the lenses of political economists along these three perspectives. It shows that (international) political economic theories can contribute to reframe and present alternative explanations for social movement emergence and broader societal social movement consequences beyond the rather narrow approaches of political opportunity structure, resource mobilisation and framing theories. This is not a small contribution. It means reevaluating the role of social movements for capitalist societies as a whole and the balance of capitalism and democracy. It opens up new and critical questions as how social movements not only challenge unjust capitalist orders but also – albeit unintentionally – contribute to stabilise rising inequalities in capitalist societies. Overall, the IPE helps to go beyond the focus of state-society interactions, but situates social movement studies in the triangular relationship of state, society, and the economy therewith providing a more holistic view on social movements' role in capitalist societies.

7 Herbert Kitschelt: Politische Gelegenheitsstrukturen in Theorien Sozialer Bewegungen Heute, in: Ansgar Klein/Hans-Josef Legrand/Thomas Leif Opladen (eds.): *Neue Soziale Bewegungen. Impulse, Bilanzen Und Perspektiven*, Opladen 1999, pp. 144–163.

8 The only exception so far is Jennifer Bair's and Florence Palpacuer's article on varieties of activism: Jennifer Bair/Florence Palpacuer: *From Varieties of Capitalism to Varieties of Activism: The Antisweatshop Movement Incomparative Perspective*, in: *Social Problems* 59:4 (2012), pp. 522–543.

9 For the historical development of international political economy as the dominant discipline (instead of political economy as such) Hans-Jürgen Bieling: *Internationale Politische Ökonomie: Eine Einführung*, Wiesbaden 2011; or Stephan Schirm: *Internationale Politische Ökonomie. Eine Einführung*, 3rd ed., Baden-Baden 2013.

10 Marcus Taylor (ed.): *Global Economy Contested: Power and Conflict across the International Division of Labour*, New York 2008.

## 2. Studying Social Movements in Capitalist Societies

This section gives an overview on how social movements operate within and shape capitalist institutions. As so far there has been little interdisciplinary exchange, this section discusses how basic political economic thinking can be made fruitful, it adds a new perspective and opens up new questions for the study of social movements.<sup>11</sup>

### 2.1 Social movements and the regulation of the economy: following Karl Polanyi's footsteps

How social movements influencing state politics is probably the most thoroughly discussed research question of the outcomes of social movements. Research on the outcomes and consequences of social movements asks about the impact of social movements on different steps in the policy process.<sup>12</sup> That means analysis stops with describing the policy implication of movement actions. The political economic perspective suggests to go a step further and ask if and how social movement effects contribute to (re-)embed markets. This section starts with a brief overview on one of the main theorists who has described and analysed the dynamics between movements and counter-movements and their implication for embedding markets, therewith inspiring and shaping the field of political economic research: Karl Polanyi.

Of course, Karl Polanyi has been inspired by the founding father of international political economy and social movement research alike: Karl Marx. For Marx resistance results out of the fact that workforce is not an ordinary good but a fictitious commodity which fights against its everyday exploitation and commodification in a variety of ways from protest and strikes to union organisation.<sup>13</sup>

Karl Polanyi to a great extent based his analysis on Marx's idea of fictitious commodities which cannot completely be commodified.<sup>14</sup> Labour, for example, cannot be completely subsumed by capitalist logic of accumulation (for example working 24 hours) as this would ultimately destroy the human ability to reproduce and survive. This is

- 11 While this article primarily focuses on the IPE contribution to social movement research, I believe the cross-fertilisation of both disciplines can make important contribution to the understanding of the political economy as well.
- 12 Edwin Amenta et al: *The Political Consequences of Social Movements*, in: *Annual Review of Sociology* 36 (2010), pp. 287–307; Marco Giugni/Doug McAdam/Charles Tilly (eds): *How Social Movements Matter*, Minneapolis 1999.
- 13 The review on how Karl Marx contributed to political economists thought and social movement research is beyond the scope of this chapter. Luckily others have already done a very good job see for example: Barker et al. (eds): *Marxism and Social Movements*.
- 14 Karl Polanyi: *The Great Transformation*, Beacon Hill et. al. 1957 (1944).

why there can be only different degrees of commodification of labour. If commodification goes too far, it triggers a counter-reaction (counter-movement) to prevent complete destruction. But in contrast to Karl Marx, Karl Polanyi focused less on class struggle but on a broader movement of societal self-protection against the expansion of markets.

Karl Polanyi argued in *The Great Transformation* that the creation of markets requires states but states also have to intervene in markets in order to prevent social chaos.<sup>15</sup> A disembedding of markets would lead to subsuming the substance of society to market logics, which he calls *satanic mill*. This grinds away the foundation of society if not safely contained by institutions. This could ultimately lead to the destruction of society and markets.<sup>16</sup> In words of Wolfgang Streeck, there was a

[...] fundamental tension between stable social integration and the operation of self-regulating markets, the later inevitably eating away at the former unless society mustered the capacity and the will to put markets in their place and keep them there.<sup>17</sup>

15 For Karl Polanyi, *The great Transformation* describes the development from pre-modern, embedded societies to free markets. He explains that markets do not evolve due to natural or given economic logics but are socially constructed and the result of politics and the state. The interpretation here is also based on the various reception of *The Great Transformation*: Jens Beckert: *The Great Transformation of Embeddedness: Karl Polanyi and the New Economic Sociology*, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies Discussion Paper 7:1 (2007), pp. 1–25; Vicki Birchfield: *Contesting the Hegemony of Market Ideology: Ideology: Gramsci's Gramsci's 'Good Sense' and Polanyi's 'Double Movement'*, in: *Review of International Political Economy* 6:1 (1999), pp. 27–54; Ayse Bugra: *Polanyi's Concept of Double Movement and Politics in the Contemporary Market Society*, in: Ayse Bugra/Kaan Agartan (eds.): *Reading Karl Polanyi for the Twenty-First Century*, New York et. al. 2007, pp. 173–189; Kurtulus Gemici: *Karl Polanyi and the Antinomies of Embeddedness*, in: *Socio-Economic Review* 6:1 (2008), pp. 5–33; Sandra Halperin: *Dynamics of Conflict and System Change: The Great Transformation Revisited*, in: *European Journal of International Relations* 10:2 (2004), pp. 263–306; Jens Beckert noted elsewhere that much of the current understanding of core concepts of Polanyi (in particular the concept of embeddedness) are shaped by the various receptions of the concepts. Jens Beckert: *Wer Zähmt den Kapitalismus*, in: *ibid./Bernhard Ebbinghaus/Anke Hassel/Philip Manow (eds.), Transformation des Kapitalismus. Festschrift für Wolfgang Streeck zum sechzigsten Geburtstag*, Frankfurt/New York 2006, pp. 425–442.

16 Karl Polanyi: *The Great Transformation*, p. 108.

17 Wolfgang Streeck: *Re-Forming Capitalism Institutional Change in the German Political Economy*, Oxford 2009, p. 253.

Karl Polanyi's inspired research argues that economic liberalisation brings about political conflict and counter-movements which aim at re-embedding the market.<sup>18</sup> In contrast to Marx, Polanyi is not talking about the labour movement, but of a broader social counter-mobilisation taming the destructive forces of markets. Thus his concept of a movement is different from the understanding and definition of social movements today. He speaks of a double movement, each of them presenting different actor constellations, power resources, and ideologies. One movement follows the principle of economic liberalism and *laissez-faire* and aims at creating self-regulating markets, the other movement is based on the idea of the protection of society:

For a century the dynamics of modern society was governed by a double movement: the market expanded continuously but this movement was met by a countermovement checking the expansion in definite directions. Vital though such a countermovement was for the protection of society, in the last analysis it was incompatible with the self-regulation of the market, and thus with the market system itself.<sup>19</sup>

Table 1 is inspired by the in-depth reconstruction of the meaning of embeddedness by Kurtulus Gemicı and summarises core conceptual ideas:

*Table 1:* the concept of embeddedness

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Embedded</b>	<b>Disembedded</b>
Ideology	Protection, justice, redistribution	Market liberalisation; <i>laissez-faire</i>
Form of regulation	Market-constraining, economy regulated by non-economic institutions	Market-making; economy regulated by economic institutions
Principle for the organisation of society	Reciprocity and redistribution, non-economic ends dominate economic life	Market; market exchange; Gain motive, rational calculus of means and ends dominate life

Of course, Polanyi's analysis has been criticised from various angles (see also sources in footnote 15). Kurtulus Gemicı (2008), for example, shows that Polanyi uses very differ-

18 Michael Burawoy: From Polanyi to Pollyanna: The False Optimism of Global Labor Studies, in: *Global Labour Journal* 1:2 (2010), pp. 301–313; Ronaldo Munck: Globalization, Labor and the 'Polanyi Problem', in: *Labor History* 45:3 (2004), pp. 251–269.

19 Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, p. 135.

ent meanings of the word embeddedness.<sup>20</sup> Embeddedness can be a theoretical concept which describes the position of the economy in politics and society at a given point in time but it can also be a holistic, methodological principle in which economy is by definition constructed by social relations and institutions and thus inseparable from them.<sup>21</sup> Another prominent criticism refers to the weak conceptualisation of the movement concept: “By overlooking the social conflicts that characterized the whole of the history of Europe’s unregulated market system [...], Polanyi produces a flawed and misleading interpretation of why and how the institutions of Europe’s 19th-century market system were transformed.”<sup>22</sup>

But despite such criticism, various political economists have followed Polanyian ideas and thoughts.<sup>23</sup> Social movement research can learn a lot by Polanyian inspired research on the development of today’s capitalist societies. In short, there is a general agreement among political economists that we see a continuous wave of disembeddedness since roughly the 1970s and the demise of the “embedded liberalism”.<sup>24</sup> The spread of neoliberal ideology manifests in global economic governance institutions and in the restoration of capitalist class power.<sup>25</sup>

As a consequence, national regulation and welfare states as a core mechanism for redistribution were subject to competitive pressure and the global spread of the market leading to a continuous weakening of domestic institutions and redistributive structures.

This characterises an epochal shift from organised capitalism during Fordism and Keynesianism towards the disorganisation of capitalism (meaning intensified commodification and liberalisation):<sup>26</sup> In terms of Germany, Wolfgang Streeck, for example, has shown that the five key institutions governing capitalism within Germany – collective bargaining, intermediary organisations, social policy, public finance and corporate governance – weaken and are unable to continue to stabilise each other. He explains those de-institutionalisation processes are the result of individual acts of capitalists who always

20 Kurtulus Gemici: Karl Polanyi and the Antinomies of Embeddedness.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

22 Sandra Halperin: *Dynamics of Conflict and System Change: The Great Transformation Revisited*, Cambridge 2004, p. 266.

23 Michael J. Piore, *Second Thoughts: On Economics, Sociology, Neoliberalism, Polanyi’s Double Movement and Intellectual Vacuums*, in: *Socioeconomic Review* 7:1 (2009), pp. 161–175.

24 John Gerard Ruggie: *Globalization and the Embedded Liberalism Compromise the End of an Era?*, Cologne 1997.

25 Stephanie Lee Mudge: *What Is Neo-Liberalism?*, in: *Socioeconomic Review* 6:4 (2008), pp. 701–731.

26 Scott Lash/John Urry: *The End of Organized Capitalism*, Cambridge 1987; Claus Offe/John Keane (eds.): *Disorganized Capitalism: Contemporary Transformations of Work and Politics*, Cambridge 1985.



reinterpret or undermine constraining institutions in order to accumulate profit.<sup>27</sup> This analysis gained prominence to understand the financial crisis and its aftermath. In his conclusion he asks:

Will today's rising pressure to reorganize society in line with the ever more demanding requirements of continued capital accumulation after almost three centuries of Western capitalism not at some point have to provoke a Polanyian counter-movement, one that tries again to set a limit to the penetration of capitalist relations into the fabric of human life? How much modernization-com-rationalization can society sustain, and how much will it take without resistance?<sup>28</sup>

His own answer to these questions is rather pessimistic:

That something is needed does not mean that it will be delivered. [...] Nobody knows how long the interplay between market expansion and social reconstruction can continue, and one may well be pessimistic and see the time coming when society will run out of answers.<sup>29</sup>

What exactly can social movement research learn from these insights? First of all, linking political economic thoughts with current analysis of social movements might lead to a fundamental reevaluation of the role and history of the so called new social movements. These movements emerged at the height of economic embeddedness – which also leads to the scientific perspective that class and social inequalities as well as unequal redistribution stopped playing a prominent role. Social movement research started to look at the sphere of reproduction and issue-specific identity politics of the women, environmental or peace movements. The economic foundations of those movements – more specifically the historically unique set of institutions embedding and constraining capitalism after the experience of the world wars – have not been discussed. Similarly, the role of new social movements during processes of deinstitutionalisation and disorganisation have never been an issue, as it did no longer seem to be relevant after the class cleavages have been closed or at least been pacified due to trade unions, (neo-)corporatist arrangements, employment regulation

27 Wolfgang Streeck: *Re-Forming Capitalism Institutional Change in the German Political Economy*, p. 256–257. Thus for him the movement for liberalisation is driven by individual capitalist entrepreneurs, who produce change without the need to act collectively. On the contrary, capitalists generate higher profit when they move alone (the so called first mover advantage) others will ultimately follow, even if it undermines the very foundations their operation is based on.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 276.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 277–278.

and a general increase in income and welfare. It seems that social movement researchers have been blinded similar to other sociologists by what Max Haller called the dominant “social stratification ideology”<sup>30</sup>, the dissolution of classes and inequality, as put forward in arguments about the *nivellierte Mittelstandsgesellschaft*<sup>31</sup> (levelled middle-class society), or *milieuspezifische Lebensstile*<sup>32</sup> (milieu-specific lifestyles). This does not mean that social movement research has not analysed the frames, counter-visions and neoliberal and capitalist criticism of various movements. While such research gives important insights on the vision of another world is possible, the analysis stops there, without discussing if these alternative visions in one way or the other turn into reality and restructure capitalist societies.

Thus the political economy perspective opens up new puzzles for social movement research: How is it possible that new social movements, which fought in various ways for more equality, were rising and gaining importance when those institutions aiming at reducing inequality started to fail? Or even more pronounced: why did social movements fundamentally fail in saving institutions protecting society from destruction of capitalist forces? Did social movements even contribute to undermine those institutions, for example by putting pressure on intermediary organisations? Or would the demise of those institutions have even been more rapidly if movements had not contributed to the spread of new democratic practices, providing the ground for the at least partial survival of industrial democracy? Did social movements albeit unintentionally contribute to stabilise or strengthen capitalist forces?

These questions suggest that we know very little about how social movements transform or replace capitalist institutions and its implications for the institutionalisation of inequality. However, there is already some research which provides insights on how social movements contribute to constructing new institutions governing capitalism.

One example is the work by Michael Piore and Sean Safford, who have shown that, as a response to the mobilisation of the black civil rights movement, a new regime of anti-discrimination laws has developed through women’s rights movement and ethnic minorities.<sup>33</sup> These laws significantly challenged the prevailing workplace regime. They

30 Max Haller: Kritik Oder Rechtfertigung Sozialer Ungleichheit? Die Deutsche ‘Sozialstrukturideologie’ vom Ende Der Klassengesellschaft in Historischer und Vergleichender Perspektive. Eine Wissenssoziologische Analyse, in: Gerd Nollmann (ed.): Sozialstruktur und Gesellschaftsanalyse: Sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung zwischen Daten, Methoden und Begriffen, Wiesbaden 2007, pp. 107–159.

31 Hans Braun: Helmut Schelskys Konzept der „Nivellierten Mittelstandsgesellschaft“ und Die Bundesrepublik Der 50er Jahre, in: Archiv für Sozialgeschichte 29 (1989), pp. 199–223.

32 Karl Martin Bolte/Stefan Hradil: Soziale Ungleichheit in Der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Opladen 1984.

33 Michael J. Piore/Sean Safford, Changing Regimes of Workplace Governance, Shifting Axes of Social Mobilization, and the Challenge to Industrial Relations Theory, in: Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society 45:3 (2006), pp. 299–325.

presented important new forms of embeddedness, as the anti-discrimination regulation decreased social inequality in terms of market access for those groups. For Michael Piore and Sean Safford the role of social movements has been similar to the role of trade unions in the construction of a collective bargaining system. One possibility for future research is to follow the example of Michael Piore and Sean Safford. We do not know much about the extent to which mobilisation contributes to the construction of new state rules regulating work, wages, market access, welfare or finance.

It is also possible that the social movements impact capitalism via other – maybe even more important – paths than via the state. Social movements could also construct and shape other not-state-based forms of rules that govern the economy. This is rather in line with the second meaning of Karl Polanyi's concept of embeddedness, saying that markets are always governed by a set of social institutions, norms and values. Studying the global justice movement, Laurence Cox and Alf Nilsen hint at various ways the movement could contribute to the transformation of capitalism:

What the 'movement of movements' seeks to do in opposing the process of neoliberal globalisation is, precisely, to challenge and remake the same forms and institutions that the literature takes as its parameters and axioms. By its own bottom-up construction of alternative structures, media and ways of being, it also poses an implicit challenge to the world.<sup>34</sup>

As Laurence Cox and Alf Nilsen do not spell out how social movements actually remake institutions, we need to look at different literature which could make some suggestions. In the following, I make some suggestions with the hope that others will contribute new ideas and elaborate further on the construction and refabrication of institutions from below.

1. Social movements construct alternative institutions that contribute to reduce inequalities and support the common good in areas where the state is (increasingly) incapable to fulfill certain tasks. This could be observed in the development of associations, self-help groups, foundations and other organisations for civil engagement, which often have their roots in social movements.<sup>35</sup> However, this kind of construction of institutions from below is also problematic from a political-economic perspective. These

34 However, the authors' line of reasoning goes into a slightly different direction. They criticise social movement research for not using social movements' own theories to theorise movements. Laurence Cox/Alf Gunvald Nilsen: *Social Movements Research and the 'Movement of Movements': Studying Resistance to Neoliberal Globalisation*, in: *Sociology Compass* 1:2 (2007), pp. 424–442.

35 Roberta G. Lessor: *Self Help Movements*, in: *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements* 2013; Annette Zimmer: *Vereine: Basiselement der Demokratie: Eine Analyse aus der Dritte-Sektor-Perspektive*, Opladen 1996.

institutions are usually complementary to state actions and cannot (and normatively should not) replace them as they cannot provide services (for example in areas of health care, education, support of the unemployed, vocational training, culture) on a broader, national scale<sup>36</sup> – thus introducing new forms of inequality and exclusion. This would violate fundamental citizenship rights and further transfer power from the political to the economic sphere, as these forms of institutions from below require funding. But especially when states implement the *Schuldenbremse* (Balanced budget amendment) and cut expenditures in order to consolidate their households – a demand imposed by the financial markets, which need to rebuild trust in national economies in order to continue to invest – funding will increasingly depend on benevolent donors.

2. Social movements could also regulate the economy by fundamentally reconstructing and reframing the moral values corporate and economic behavior rests upon.<sup>37</sup> One core insight of neo-institutionalists is that companies and organisations in general behave in congruence with the expectations of their environment. They do so as legitimacy of their environment is crucial for their organisational survival. This line of research has identified various sources of legitimacy of organisations.<sup>38</sup> Sabrina Zajak for example has shown that social movements can reframe those legitimacy resources therewith contributing to change in corporate behavior.<sup>39</sup> Further research could dig deeper into how social movements influence economic behaviour by discursive strategies and the reframing of norms and values.

In addition, literature has identified other mechanisms by which movements influence markets, for example by the mobilisation of consumers,<sup>40</sup> boycotts or shareholder activism.<sup>41</sup> Movements also create new markets, which present alternatives to the dom-

36 One example is that doctors without borders are providing health care in certain areas of Greece as the national health care system is collapsing.

37 Colin Crouch: Sustainability, Neoliberalism, and the Moral Quality of Capitalism, in: Business and Professional Ethics Journal 31:2 (2012), pp. 363–374.

38 Richard W. Scott: Institutions and Organizations, Thousand Oaks 2008 (1995); David L. Deephouse/Mark Suchman: Legitimacy in Organizational Institutionalism, in: Royston Greenwood et al. (eds.): The Sage Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism, London 2008, pp. 49–78.

39 Sabrina Zajak: Public Battles over Legitimacy Perceptions: Reframing Legitimacy as Strategic Action across Fields, paper presented at the European Sociological Association, Turin 2013.

40 Michelle Micheletti/Dietlind Stolle: Mobilizing Consumers to Take Responsibility for Global Social Justice, in: The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 611:1 (2007), pp. 157–175; Sigrid Baringhorst et al. (eds): Politik Mit Dem Einkaufswagen: Unternehmen und Konsumenten in der Globalen Mediengesellschaft, Bielefeld 2007.

41 Brayden G. King/Sarah A. Soule: Social Movements as Extra-Institutional Entrepreneurs: The Effect of Protests on Stock Price Returns, in: Administrative Science Quarterly 52 (2007), pp. 413–442.

inant economic models of competition, always lower prices and the externalisation of costs into society. The fair trade movement is the most prominent example.<sup>42</sup>

While this line of research produced insights on how social movements influence corporate behavior, it is less clear if and how such forms of mobilisation can contribute to re-embed markets in protective standards. There are competing interpretations. Tim Barley and Curtis Child, for example, have argued that “the dynamics of transnational anti-corporate campaigns are in some ways akin to Polanyi’s (1944) ‘double movement’ of capitalism on a global scale, wherein the intensification of market logics generates attempts to re-embed markets in protective standards”.<sup>43</sup> Others remain skeptical about the potential increase in power of companies turn into rule makers and regulators as a response to activist demands. Such a political power does not mean that companies automatically follow the will or interests of the people. It remains on the discretions of the management how the company balances civil society demands with shareholder interests for profit maximisation.<sup>44</sup> Thus the company can use the power either to enforce standards or to promote a further disembedding and re-regulation. In many cases companies do both at the same time.

3. A political economic perspective could also increase our understanding or open up other perspectives on the current waves of protests against the ongoing capitalist crisis. Currently there is an ever growing literature on the current protests in North Africa, Southern Europe or other parts of the world.<sup>45</sup> It has been widely acknowledged that these protests, although inherently local and/or national in their major demands, are also a response to the destructive forces of capitalism on the various institutions balancing inequality on a by and large acceptable level.<sup>46</sup> From a political economic perspective it is not surprising that concrete criticism and economic, social, and austerity politics go

42 Janette Webb: *Seduced or Sceptical Consumers? Organised Action and the Case of Fair Trade Coffee*, in: *Sociological Research Online* 12:3 (2007).

43 Tim Bartley/Child Curtis: *Shaming the Corporation: Globalization, Reputation and the Dynamics of Anti-Corporate Movement*, paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, New York 2007, p. 3.

44 Colin Crouch: *Das Befremdliche Überleben des Neoliberalismus*, Berlin 2011.

45 Cristina Flesher Fominaya/Laurence Cox (eds.): *Understanding European Movements: New Social Movements, Global Justice Struggles, Anti-Austerity Protest*, Abington/New York 2013; William A Gamson/Micah L Sifry: *The Occupy Movement: An Introduction*, in: *The Sociological Quarterly* 54:2 (2013), pp. 159–163; Maria Kousis: *New Transnational Economic Contention in the Eurozone: Greek and Southern European Anti-Austerity Resistance*, paper presented at the 20th International Conference of Europeanists-Crisis & Contingency: States of (In) Stability, 2013.

46 Donatella Della Porta: *Bringing Capitalism Back In?: A Research Agenda on Anti-Austerity Protests in Late Neoliberalism*, presented at: ECPR Genreal conference, Bordeaux September 2013.

hand in hand with a much more fundamental criticism of the existing democratic institutions. The ongoing crisis has led to the brake up of the social contract and thus governments by the people are no longer (capable of) producing politics for the people. Crisis protests raise interesting questions, for example if they are able to re-embed unleashed markets. To what extent do the movements against unregulated financial markets contribute to the development of new rules protecting the society? To what extent are new institutions build from below, trickling-up and either help to stabilise old institutions or help to create new ones?

This section started with the reconstruction of major insights of the Polanyian perspective on the development of capitalist societies driven by movements in favour of liberalisation and commodification and those against it. It then presented some more recent variants of Polanyian ideas and some open questions, which emerge from a political economist perspective on social movements, in particular relating to their role in embedding and disembedding, institutionalising and de-institutionalising capitalism. Polanyian thinking has also inspired comparative and international political economic approaches, as the next sections show.

## 2.2 Varieties of capitalism and varieties of activism

In social movement research, the most prominent approach for explaining differences between social movements across states is the political opportunity approach. The political opportunity approach explains variations in mobilisation with differences in the political context. Political opportunities can be broadly defined as characteristics of political institutions that determine the relative ability of outside groups to influence decision making within an institution. They are “consistent but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements”.<sup>47</sup> This approach has produced viable explanations for the differences and similarities between movements.<sup>48</sup> But it did not take into account that differences in the political-economic context might also have explanatory value for the development and outcomes of social movement. This section briefly outlines the comparative of capitalism approach before it then gives examples on how it could potentially open up new research questions.

47 Sidney Tarrow: *States and Opportunities: The Political Structuring of Social Movements*, in: Doug McAdam/John D. McCarthy/Mayer N. Zald (eds.): *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, New York 1996, p. 41–61, p. 54.

48 Hanspeter Kriesi: *Political Context and Opportunity*, in: David A. Snow/Sarah A. Soule/Hanspeter Kriesi (eds.): *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, Malden/Oxford/Carlton 2004, pp. 67–91.

The core argument of this approach is that globalisation, market dynamics or processes of disorganisation do not automatically lead to the breakdown of national institutions. Instead we can observe differences in capitalist dynamics due to the persistence of distinct sets of institutions in different national contexts. With the words of Polanyi, the degree and forms of embeddedness varies across countries.

There are different approaches within the comparative capitalism literature.<sup>49</sup> The most prominent one is the varieties of capitalism approach (VOC).<sup>50</sup> In short, VOC differentiates between liberal market economies (LMEs) where market patterns of coordination and conflictual labour relations dominated, on the one hand, and coordinated market economies (CME), which are characterised by coporatist configurations of institutions, on the other one.<sup>51</sup>

These two models form ends of a continuum along which nation-states can be arrayed. Overall VOC implies that national economies develop distinct institutional configurations in areas such as industrial relations, financial systems, education, innovation, corporate governance, inter-firm relations or welfare systems, with specific strength and weaknesses for certain economic actions. It implies that common pressures are refracted by different sets of institutions.<sup>52</sup> This is an important contribution as it stands in contrast to economic interpretations of political economies, which consider institutions either as unimportant due to the unfettered power of markets or as hindrances to free markets.<sup>53</sup>

This line of research faces similar problems as the political opportunity structure approach. There is no agreement on how many different types of capitalism exist and what kind of institutions shall be included in the definition of the typology. Similarly, there is no final agreement on a list of political opportunities or their degree of stability. Despite disagreement about specific factors, institutions and governance mechanisms as well as comparative capitalist approaches share some analytical premises. First, their major aim is to understand the role of institutional differences for economic outcomes such as growth, efficiency and innovation. Second and most importantly, they consider the various institutions as interdependent. One of the major concepts that characterises

49 Gregory Jackson/Richard Deeg: *How Many Varieties of Capitalism?: Comparing the Comparative Institutional Analyses of Capitalist Diversity*, in: Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies Discussion Paper 06:2 (2006), pp. 1–48.

50 Peter A. Hall/David Soskice: *Varieties of Capitalism. The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage*.

51 *Ibid.*

52 Gregory Jackson/Richard Deeg: *How Many Varieties of Capitalism?: Comparing the Comparative Institutional Analyses of Capitalist Diversity*.

53 The idea of varieties is also an important difference to Marxists' conception of capitalist development in stages. *Ibid.*

this interdependence is the idea of institutional complementarity. Complementarity means that only the combination of institutions produces a certain outcome. Thus changes in one institution affect the functioning of the other interrelated institutions.<sup>54</sup> This interdependence is usually considered as a major source of stability, preventing converging effects on global markets and global capitalist crisis on different national systems. Gregory Jackson and Richard Deeg summarise the core of comparative capitalism approaches the following way: “In sum, the CC [comparative capitalism] literature looks at economic activity as being socially embedded within institutional contexts and compares these contexts across different scales, such as sectors, regions and especially nations”.<sup>55</sup>

Similar to the POS approach, VOC could serve as a heuristic to look for additional explanatory factors for social movement interactions with capitalist institutions. To give an example: while it is a very common phenomenon that social movement organisations collaborate with trade unions, for example in the organisation of protest events,<sup>56</sup> we know very little about the country-specific differences between social movement and trade unions cooperation. Different political-economic settings, in particular the role and strength of organised labour within it, might help to explain why trade unions but also social movement organisations tend to cooperate. It might also provide more specific explanations of why trade unions in some contexts (London Metal Exchange, LMEs) are more open to engage in confrontative tactics and therefore more prone to collaborate with activist groups in public naming and shaming strategies while in others, cooperation with business and state is considered as core strategy (CMEs). Thus differences in industrial relation systems as well as trade unions strength and strategies could help to explain differences in cooperation between activists and trade unions, their joint repertoires of contention, and their overall strategies in terms of targeting state and business actors.

Comparative research on the outcomes of corporate campaigns and more generally mobilisation in the market could also greatly profit from integrating insights from varieties of capitalism approaches. For example, differences in corporate governance systems,

54 Martin Höpner defines complementarity the following way: Complementarity is a functional category and means that the performance of a configuration increases when its elements assume specific properties. Martin Höpner: *What Connects Industrial Relations and Corporate Governance?: Explaining Institutional Complementarity*, in: *Socio-Economic Review* 3:2 (2005), pp. 331–358, p. 333.

55 Gregory Jackson/Richard Deeg: *How Many Varieties of Capitalism? Comparing the Comparative Institutional Analyses of Capitalist Diversity*, p. 12.

56 This has been the case right from the beginning of the emergence of new social movements, intensified with the emergence of the global justice movement and has become standard practice during the recent anti-austerity protests in Europe.



that is between countries in which companies are more open towards stakeholder participation and countries where companies are predominantly governed by a shareholder orientation, might affect corporate responses to activist demands.

The idea of institutional interdependence and complementarity could also prove particularly useful for social movement scholars. VOC argues, for example, that the type of welfare state impacts, industrial relations, employment patterns but also the shape of the financial system and corporate governance structures through a range of different mechanisms.<sup>57</sup> It is an interesting question of how these mechanisms also affect the basis for mobilisation within countries. For example, we might be able to observe different patterns of mobilisation in countries where the economic crisis more strongly undermines support by the welfare state, increases the dependence on market mechanisms on the job market (and thus insecurity, precariousness and unemployment), weakens trade unions and leaves a small range of shareholders continuously making large profits.

The only research so far, which combines social movement research and VOC approach, is the study by Jennifer Bair and Florence Palpacuer.<sup>58</sup> They explain differences in the development and consequences of anti-sweatshop activism between the US, Europe and Canada with differences in the organisation of capitalism. For them VOC provides an explanation for the actors involved in anti-sweatshop activism, their perspective on strategies and best outcomes.

The idea of multiple institutions that interact resonates with the multi-institutional politics approach in social movement research.<sup>59</sup> In contrast to the political process approach, which focuses on the state as the target and context for social movements, the multi-institutional politics approach stresses that there are multiple sources of power within society shaping social movement actions. These multi-institutional systems can create specific opportunities and threats to social movements. Social movements could, for example, shop around or rapidly switch targets according to their perceived changes of success.<sup>60</sup> In addition, movements could try to target multiple institutions, or specific set of institutions. If social movements manage to trigger change then also depends on the relations among institutions and in how far they reinforce each other. Elizabeth Armstrong and Mary Bernstein summarise the multi-institutional approach the following way: "Society is viewed as composed of multiple and contradictory institutions with each institution viewed as mutually constituted by classificatory systems and practices

57 Gregory Jackson/Richard Deeg: *How Many Varieties of Capitalism?: Comparing the Comparative Institutional Analyses of Capitalist Diversity*, p. 19.

58 Jennifer Bair/Florence Palpacuer: *From Varieties of Capitalism to Varieties of Activism: The Antisweatshop Movement Incomparative Perspective*.

59 Elizabeth A. Armstrong/Mary Bernstein: *Culture, Power, and Institutions: A Multi-Institutional Politics Approach to Social Movements*, in: *Sociological Theory* 26:1 (2008), pp. 74–99.

60 *Ibid.*: p. 87.

that concretize these systems”.<sup>61</sup> But although the authors acknowledge that movements target state and private entities, they were not concerned with political-economic institutions. Yet both perspectives share similar basic assumptions on multiple and interacting institutions.

Overall, these are only few examples for exploring cross-fertilisation of a rich body of literature on comparative capitalism. I believe combining insights from the varieties of capitalism or more broadly from the comparative capitalism approach with other existing concepts in social movement studies (such as political opportunity structure) could greatly enhance our understanding of similarities and differences between social movements and their consequences across countries.

### 2.3 Transnational mobilisation within the international political economy

The last major area for cross fertilisation is the issue of transnational mobilisation and international political economy. In a way, there are several parallels between the lack of cross-fertilisation between social movement research and political economy research at the national level as discussed in section 2.1.

There are multiple studies on social movements which at first sight seem to be directly related to international capitalism, the global spread of markets and the rise of neoliberalism as the dominant ideology of our time. Especially since the end of the 1990s, the Battle of Seattle and later the rise of World Social Forums triggered a range of literature and research into the alter-globalisation movement, or into the global justice movement, alter globalisation movements,<sup>62</sup> which oddly enough do not direct their analysis to socio-economic structures and capitalist dynamics as a whole. Goodwin and Heatland summarise this development in social movement research the following way: “The results are clear and ironic: During an era in which global capitalism became ever more powerful [...] it also became increasingly invisible to scholars of popular movements.”<sup>63</sup>

Instead of viewing global economic governance institutions as the result of struggles between market-regulating and market-making forces, social movement research tends to see governance beyond borders as a problem of the transformation of the state, political denationalisation and political integration. Michael Zürn and others argue that the various forms of resistance and demands to international organisations are a response to

61 *Ibid.*: p. 87.

62 Donatella Della Porta: *The Global Justice Movement in Context*, in: Donatella Della Porta (ed.): *The Global Justice Movement: Cross-national and Transnational Perspectives*, Boulder 2008, pp. 232–251; Simon Teune (ed.): *The Transnational Condition: Protest Dynamics in an Entangled Europe: Protest Dynamics in an Entangled Europe*, New York/Oxford 2010.

63 Jeff Goodwin/Gabriel Hetland: *The Strange Disappearance of Capitalism from Social Movement Studies*, p. 13.

the increasing scope and authority of international decision making and its perceived legitimacy deficit “governance with and without government is confronted with the same demands as governance by government”.<sup>64</sup> This leaves aside the political-economic perspectives of the politicisation of global economic governance institutions.

Interestingly, social movement researchers turned towards international relation scholars and important theorising has been done by combining insights of both strands of research.<sup>65</sup> Particularly influential was the work of Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink and their concept of transnational advocacy networks (TANs).<sup>66</sup> They argue that TANs shape international politics by information politics (generation and dissemination of salient information), symbolic politics (use of symbols and narratives to connect with a variety of audiences), leverage politics (alliances with stronger actors), and accountability politics (holding actors accountable to promises). Issues such as the power of economic actors and market dynamics did not play a role in their study. Social movement research increasingly acknowledges that transnational activists operate in a context of complex internationalism, characterised by fragmented institutions that provide differentiated opportunities to external actors.<sup>67</sup> However, their major concern is to understand the relationship of political openings and closures in multilevel governance arrangements, how and why movements externalise their claims and shift scales.<sup>68</sup>

Yet, in this area at least some exchange between disciplines has taken place. Most prominently scholars researching transnational labour rights activism have integrated an international political economic perspective. Several authors have explored how the reorganisation of production, the rise of global supply chains and industrial restructuring has not only created grievances and threats to labour organising but also opportunities for counter-organisation.<sup>69</sup> Several authors have shown how transnational alliances,

64 Michael Zürn/Matthias Ecker-Ehrhardt (eds.): *Die Politisierung der Weltpolitik: Umkämpfte internationale Institutionen*, Frankfurt am Main 2011.

65 Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism*, Cambridge 2005.

66 Margaret E. Keck/Kathryn Sikkink: *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, Ithaca/London/New York 1998.

67 Donatella Della Porta/Sidney Tarrow (eds.): *Transnational Protest and Global Activism*, Oxford 2005.

68 Sidney Tarrow/Dough McAdam: *Scale Shift in Transnational Contention*, in: Sidney Tarrow/Donatella della Porta (eds.): *Transnational Protest and Global Activism*, Oxford 2005, pp. 121–147.

69 Mark Anner: *Forging New Labor Activism in Global Commodity Chains in Latin America*, in: *International Labor and Working-Class History* 72:01 (2007), pp. 18–41; Peter Evans: *Fighting Marginalization with Transnational Networks: Counter-Hegemonic Globalization*, in: *Contemporary Sociology* 29:1 (2000), pp. 230–241; Jeroen Merk: *Jumping Scale and Bridging Space in the Era of Corporate Social Responsibility: Cross-Border Labour Struggles in the Global Garment Industry*, in: *Third World Quarterly* 30:3 (2009), pp. 599–615.

addressing both international economic and political institutions, and actors challenge and change abusive working conditions at the end of global supply chains.<sup>70</sup>

There are some examples on how mobilisation has contributed to the emergence of new forms of regulation. Some researchers have shown how transnational mobilisation has contributed to the emergence of new forms of transnational private regulation.<sup>71</sup> In the issue area of copy right, Quack and Dobusch have shown how weak, non-elite coalitions experiment with alternative forms of transnational regulation to replace other dominant institutions constructed by economic actors, therewith contributing to change within the international political economy.<sup>72</sup> Such examples are valuable contributions discussing the transnational construction of alternative institutions from below. Others have approached the topic of international political economy and social movements from a framing or discursive perspective. Olesen has integrated political-economic perspective with a framing and social constructivist approach by arguing that globalisation “is both an objective process involving certain structural transformations and a subjective process intimately related to the way social actors interpret these changes and give them meaning”.<sup>73</sup>

However, we need more research beyond the issue area of labour, following Cesar A. Rodriguez-Garavito’s call that research on global civil society in general and transnational mobilisation “need to theorize and empirically document its interaction with concomitant processes of economic and regulatory integration”.<sup>74</sup> Jean Grugel and Anders Uhlin argue

[...] there is the danger of a disconnect between critical analysis of global capitalism, on the one hand, and bottom-up studies of organisation by and for ‘ordinary people’,

- 70 Sabrina Zajak: *In the Shadow of the Dragon: Transnational Labor Activism between State and Private Politics a Multi-Level Analysis of Labor Activism Targeting China*, Cologne 2013; Cesar A. Rodriguez-Garavito: *Sewing Resistance: Global Production, Transnational Organizing, Global Governance in the U. S. Caribbean Basin Apparel Industry (1990–2005)*, Madison 2007.
- 71 Tim Bartley: *Institutional Emergence in an Era of Globalization: The Rise of Transnational Private Regulation of Labor and Environmental Conditions*, in: *American Journal of Sociology* 113:2 (2007), pp. 297–351; Luc Fransen: *Minding Their Own Business: Firms and Activists in the Making of Private Regulation*, PhD Disseration, Amsterdam 2010.
- 72 Leonard Dobusch/Sigrid Quack: *Framing Standards, Mobilizing Users: Copyright Versus Fair Use in Transnational Regulation*, *Review of International Political Economy* 20:1 (2012), pp. 52–88.
- 73 Thomas Olesen: *The Uses and Misuses of Globalization in the Study of Social Movements*, in: *Social Movement Studies* 4:1 (2005), pp. 49–63.
- 74 Cesar A. Rodriguez-Garavito: *Sewing Resistance: Global Production, Transnational Organising, Global Governance in the U. S. Caribbean Basin Apparel Industry (1990–2005)*, p. 3.

some of whom, moreover, are vulnerable in ways that go beyond their position in labour markets and production processes.<sup>75</sup>

This would imply shifting the empirical focus towards differentiating between political and economic governance institutions (for example United Nations and World Trade Organisation), social movements' contribution to the creation of a new form of governance, the implications of the interlinkages of global (economic) governance institutions, and the role of social movements in the implementation and translation of international standards regulating the economy.

### 3. Conclusion: A Political Economic Perspective on Social Movements

This article has given an overview on existing exchange between research on political economy and social movements. It has tried to further this debate and exchange between disciplines. The article aimed to build linkages between still rather unconnected literatures. It focused on three central areas for cross-fertilisation: social movements within national systems of capitalism, a comparative approach to social movements within different varieties of capitalism and social movements within the international political economy. Therewith the article tried to overcome a relatively narrow perspective on social movements and capitalism based on class cleavages. Overall this article suggests that the exchange between disciplines can enhance our understanding of mobilisation and its consequences by bringing in particular the following ideas to social movement research:

1. All economic systems are socially and politically constructed (socially and politically embedded) and there is no universal market logic leading to homogenisation. Free and unregulated markets are impossible to create as this would destroy the foundations of society. While this is common knowledge in political economy, social movement research still needs to ask about the role of social movements in the construction about also destruction of institutions governing capitalism today. Researchers need to be open for the possibility that social movements (albeit unintentionally) contribute to a further disembedding of markets or strengthening of capitalist forces. Future research should also look for processes and mechanisms turning criticism into capitalist innovations. This is particularly relevant, given the dominance of neoliberal ideology despite continuous mobilisation for social justice and democracy. Therewith social movement research can contribute to better understand the strength and resilience of neoliberal capitalism enduring even severe crisis and massive protest.

75 Jean Grugel/Anders Uhlin: *Renewing Global Governance: Demanding Rights and Justice in the Global South*, in: *Third World Quarterly* 33:9 (2012), pp. 1703–1718, p. 1704.

2. The article has proposed various ways to study how social movements shape capitalist institutions. For example, they create alternative institutions from below that replace or challenge existing ones, they target or support them directly, or they reformulate the normative and moral basis of those institutions. But capitalism is not governed by a single institution alone. Instead there are multiple-institutions (such as financial regulation, trade unions, labour regulation, corporate governance, welfare state) that govern capitalism. Moreover, they interrelate and interact with each other. Social movement research has yet to begin conceptualising how to situate movements and their effect in such multi-institutional environments.

Bringing capitalism back in debate has started to re-shift the attention towards class structures, the structuration of cleavages and their implication for mobilisation. This article has taken these ideas as a starting point in order to broaden this debate and to pay closer attention to the interaction between social movements and institutions governing capitalism. Of course, the propositions made in this article are not exhaustive and future studies should take a deeper look into specific theories to explore their potential for cross-fertilisation.

**Sabrina Zajak** is Junior Professor at the Institute for Social Movements, Ruhr-Universität Bochum. She is founding member of the Institute for Protest and Social Movement Research in Berlin and member of the Research Group *Institution Building across Borders* at the Max-Planck-Institute for the Studies of Societies in Cologne. She recently published: *Transnational Private Regulation and the Transformation of Labour Rights Organisations in Emerging Markets: New Markets for Labour Support Work in China*, in: *Journal of Asian Public Policy* (2013).