

Call for contributions

Comparison, Analysis, Critique – Perspectives on the Diversity of Contemporary Capitalism(s)

The observation that there is significant diversity within capitalism is an old one, but recently it has been most notably argued by the so-called comparative capitalisms literatures. This term encompasses various perspectives, whose common denominator is the crucial role played by national institutions in mediating and resisting international and global pressures and developments. A key milestone was the publication in 2001 of the Hall & Soskice *Varieties of Capitalism* volume, which has been central to how the subsequent debates on national capitalisms within the global economy have evolved. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, institutionalist perspectives on capitalist diversity acquired a hegemonic status within comparative political economy research in and after the 2000s.

In contrast, the critical political economy literature helped contribute to its own marginalisation in this field by neglecting the rich history of scholarship on historically and geographically specific forms of capitalism, focusing instead on ‘macro’ and transnational developments. Although this work has been very important in its own right, it has left the manifold weaknesses of the comparative capitalisms literatures insulated from critique. Thus, the problematic assumptions regarding the role of firms as opposed to labour; the rationalist micro-perspective underlying the larger explanatory narrative; the methodological nationalism; the partial conception of politico-economic change; the ‘essence’ of the state and associated institutions; and the privileging of institutions more generally, have remained under-explored. Hence the dominance of these perspectives has been maintained.

It is against this background that this project seeks to make an intervention in the field, engaging with comparative capitalisms research from a series of alternative perspectives rooted in the broad and pluralistic field of critical political economy. Through this we also hope to strengthen and improve the dialogue between critical political economy scholars from different disciplinary, philosophical and geographical traditions. By providing the space for such an engagement, we hope to contribute to the promotion, consolidation and cross-fertilisation of the various critical perspectives on capitalist diversity, and thus to a necessary questioning of the institutionalist comparative capitalisms mainstream.

In order to promote this two-way dialogue we will hold a conference at Goethe University Frankfurt from 10-11 February 2012, with the joint support from the German Assoziation für kritische Gesellschaftsforschung (Association for Critical Social Research) and the International Political Economy working group of the British International Studies Association. The proceedings of the event will feed into two key publications: a German-language volume to be published in autumn 2012 with Verlag Westfälisches Dampfboot; and a special issue of a peer-reviewed English-language journal in 2013. While there will be overlap in terms of some of the content, the two publications will be oriented to tackling most effectively the gaps and omissions in German- and English-language scholarship on the topic, respectively. Although the conference will be English-language, the papers presented can be in English or German; furthermore, papers will be translated if necessary for their inclusion in either or both of the publications.

Perspectives from which interventions could be framed include critical institutionalism, regulation theory, materialist state theory, structural Marxism, feminist political economy, transnational historical materialism, dependency and world systems approaches, postcolonial studies, critical geography, uneven and combined development. This list is not exhaustive, however, and we seek contributions from scholars with an interest in critical political economy research, whatever their paradigmatic background and disciplinary affiliation (sociology, political science, economics, geography, anthropology, ethnology, development studies, area studies, history, etc.). Moreover, we invite both junior and senior researchers, from postgraduate students to professors, to contribute.

Given the nature of the intervention that we seek to make, we expect participants to be committed to completing a full paper shortly after the conference. Moreover, they will all be asked to respect the following **broad guidelines** in order to ensure that: a) their papers complement each other, giving the two publications a strong sense of collective identity; and b) their individual contribution is targeted, clear, and cutting-edge.

1. Authors should outline their **respective take on capitalist diversity** (historical and geographical) in an **accessible** manner (for example, briefly referring to basic theoretical tenets and outlining central conceptual tools, where necessary). While staking out the distinctiveness of the respective perspective, they should also show where there are points of communication and overlap with other critical approaches present in the publication.
2. Drawing on this, they should formulate a **critique of the institutionalist comparative capitalisms literature**, not merely repeating general points but via being **innovative and specific** ('targeted'). Conversely, if they so wish, they should show how – and if – critical political economy perspectives on capitalist diversity can 'rescue' (or take on board) specific insights from comparative capitalisms scholarship.
3. To sustain the advocated perspective and make the critique more effective, contributions should **use empirical examples and illustrations**, where appropriate.
4. Contributions should neither be introductions to the respective perspective from which they are formulated nor to the comparative capitalisms literatures, but only include aspects of these when absolutely necessary for the above three points and not already covered in the introductory part of the volume.

Proposals of about 400 words, outlining the central theoretical-conceptual arguments and empirical support, should be sent to the organisers of the Frankfurt event under ian.bruff@manchester.ac.uk, m.ebenau@qmul.ac.uk, and a.noelke@soz.uni-frankfurt.de by **Friday 11 November 2011** at the latest. A decision on the proposals will be made by **Wednesday 23 November**.

Best wishes,
Ian Bruff (University of Manchester),
Matthias Ebenau (Queen Mary, University of London), and
Andreas Nölke (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt)