Radical Futures

For classical anti-capitalist theory, social struggles arise from social contradictions. Analyzing these contradictions and articulating ways to overcome them is central even for social movements that are not explicitly anti-capitalist. Hence, the question of overcoming is entangled with the question of the possibility of imagining a radical outside. However, we can observe how practices and discourses of radical social change are contained and dismantled by capitalist appropriation. This becomes evident e.g. in an overlap of ideas, concepts, demands and practices; notions like self-determination, democracy, solidarity, care, freedom and responsibility are (re)formulated in ways that often take a (soft) authoritarian twist.

This workshop asks how current and historical social movements in different regions of the world negotiate transformative ideas and practices against the background of these global capitalist logics. What contradictions and ambivalences do social movements articulate and what do they understand to be radical? Do they analyze attempts to co-opt and contain them, and to what extent do they resist them? How can possibilities of breaking away from hegemonic thought and conceiving alternatives under given conditions be grasped in terms of practices of (un)commoning?

Based on empirical studies, this workshop aims at critically examining social struggles from two complementary perspectives: We want to understand whether and how they identify and perceive contradictions, as well as how and with which theoretical and practical references these contradictions are negotiated. This way, we wish to address the possibilities and limits of ‘radical futures’ in the light of capitalist authoritarian co-optation.

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