

Call for papers:

“Class without consciousness” – The Politics of Fragmented Class Identities

Department of Social Science, Scuola Normale Superiore, Florence

14-15 November 2019

Organizers: Donatella della Porta, Linus Westheuser (SNS)

Keynote lectures: **Donatella della Porta** (SNS), **Mike Savage** (London School of Economics),
Klaus Dörre (University of Jena), and **Don Kalb** (University of Bergen)

In the crisis of neoliberal globalization, the socio-structural bases of political conflict are returning to the top of the agenda. Surges of the populist right relied on winning over segments of the working class to an anti-immigration coalition. At the same time, a socialist ‘class left’, often spearheaded by young, precarious segments of the new middle class, has been showing signs of a revival. Amidst a secular decline of union power, strategies of rank-and-file organizing at times proved successful in uniting workers across ethnic and other divides. And in countries hit by the 2008 crisis, contention over austerity politics and precarity gave rise to cross-class alliances in the electoral and protest arenas. Pronouncements of a ‘death of class’ made in the 1990s today seem questionable at best.

Yet the prominence of class vocabulary had not only waned in social science research, but also in public discourses and the self-understandings of many wage dependent people. While rising inequalities, the power of capital over labor, and austerity politics create new distributional conflicts, divisions between different segments of working people – by education and skills, occupation, sector, ethnicity and citizenship, geographic location, precarity, gender, and age – proliferate positions within the class structure, fragment it and render it opaque in everyday life. This creates a contradictory moment in which the increasing prevalence of class inequality coincides with exceptionally weak class identities: “Class without consciousness” (J.Stacul).

The conference wants to provide an academic forum for discussing the dynamic, contradictory, and often hidden politics of class identity in an age of rising inequality and opaque class structures. In particular, we are interested in the following themes:

- How does the fragmentation and demobilization of class identities help understand **right-wing populism** and the relative weakness of left-wing social blocs across the West?
How are class identities mobilized and reshaped in alliances on the radical right?

- How does the partial **eclipse of the class cleavage** by a new cleavage over migration and national closure play out at the level of identities?
- Where do we see the **persistence of a sense of class relations** in other forms of identity discourse, such as those of national belonging, moral boundaries, populism, or ‘citizenism’? What **new forms of class consciousness** are emerging?
- Do experiences of **precarity** obstruct or rekindle the formation of class consciousness?
- How are class identities de- and repoliticized at **intersections** with other forms of social organization, distinction and domination, such as ethnicity, gender, and sexuality?
- Which identities can **progressive class alliances** between workers and parts of the middle class appeal to? Which misunderstandings should be avoided?

The conference invites contributions from all related academic fields, including political and cultural sociology, party politics, social movement studies, anthropology, political economy, social psychology, cultural and media studies, and others.

We also welcome input from practitioners, organizers, strategists, and activists, working to build alliances across class divides. Get in touch to discuss alternative presentation formats.

Please send an abstract of your planned contribution (max. 500 words) by **30 June 2019** to linus.westheuser@sns.it.