

PhD Research Course

Studying Global Governance from Above and Below: Multilateral organizations, collective action and the politics of development in the Global South

Course Leaders

Alf Gunvald Nilsen

Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, UiB

Tor Halvorsen

Associate Professor, Department of Administration and Organization Theory, UiB

Lecturers

Thorvald Gran

Professor, Department of Administration and Organisation Theory, UiB

Jeppe Kolding

Associate Professor, Department of Biology, UiB

Hans Geir Aasmundsen

Researcher, UiB Global

Etienne Nel

CROP and University of Otago, New Zealand

Guest Lecturers

Srila Roy

Senior Lecturer in Sociology, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa

Adam Branch

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, San Diego State University / Makerere Institute of Social Research, Uganda

This course proposes to contribute to critical debates about the role of global governance in defining the politics of development in the global South. More specifically, the course aims to critically investigate global governance from two interrelated vantage points – (i) from “above”, with reference to how multilateral organizations shape and practice global governance and influence governance at the level of national-policy fields related to development; (ii) from “below”, with reference to how communities in the global South respond to the strategies and discourses of global governance through various forms of collective action and assertion – ranging from everyday practices of resistance to large-scale social movements.

The ambition of the course is thus to provide doctoral students from across the social sciences with a space to critically discuss various ways of approaching the study of global governance with reference to wider debates on how the complex dialectics of power and resistance shape the politics of development in the global South. The course will be divided into two subsections, corresponding to the overall “from above/”from below”-heuristic that structures the course: (i) global governance and multilateral organizations and (ii) global governance and collective action.

One week will be devoted to each sub-section of the course, with a plenary session and an invited speaker for each week, as well as a comprehensive set of activities geared towards enabling an engaging debate between doctoral students whose projects are focused on multilateral organizations and doctoral students whose projects are centered on collective action in various guises.

The concept of “governmentality” – a term coined by Michel Foucault to designate the complex forms of power that “has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument” (Foucault, 2004: 108) – has in recent years become central to investigations in the field of critical development research. Much of the scholarly work on development and governmentality has sought to decipher the ways in which transnational, national and nongovernmental actors have authored “a technology of power” (ibid.: 117) in the form of discourses and strategies of governance that seek to regulate the populations of the global South in manifold ways. As much as such studies have been useful in terms of promoting a more critical perspective on governance, it has been argued that this approach have portrayed governmentality in ways which fails to appreciate “the ever-present possibility that a governmental intervention will be challenged by critics rejecting its diagnoses and prescriptions” (Li, 2007: 17).

Thus, this course will study governance and governmentality from the bottom-up, with a focus on how social movements and other forms of popular collective action engage with and challenge the articulation and operation of technologies of rule in the global South. In particular, the focus will be put upon the dynamics that emerge when poor and excluded groups mobilize in relation to strategies and discourses of governance (for example, rights based legislation implemented by states, discourses of empowerment articulated by NGOs, and/or legal regimes developed by transnational institutions) – whether on a local and everyday basis or through large-scale popular mobilizations across spatial scales. A key question that will structure discussions on this course will be: *What are the possibilities for, and limitations to, progressive change that the social movements and oppositional politics of poor and excluded groups encounter as they mobilize in relation to strategies and discourses of governance in the global South?*