



**Law, Technology and Social Movements: Global Citizens and Experts**  
*Virtual Seminar, Spring/Summer 2021 Call for Applications*

One of the most exciting and consequential developments of the last two years has been the rise of new forms of global social movements, propelled both by new uses of digital technologies and by distrust in existing institutional forums for citizen participation in governance. Many of these global movements explicitly or implicitly set up a confrontation between experts on the one hand—bureaucrats, lawyers, scientists, computer programmers—and publics on the other. Citizens accuse experts of living in an epistemological bubble, oblivious to the interests of ordinary people, as they make value-laden choices with significant social consequences. Experts insist that the issues are highly “technical” and serious discussion is difficult without an extensive basis of shared detailed knowledge.

These social movements and their implications for the regulation of significant areas of social life - from public health, to environmental protection, to financial markets, to the social uses of technologies such as AI - are poorly understood across the disciplines. International legal scholars focusing on such topics as New Governance tend to theorize public participation in expert processes without significant empirical understanding of ordinary citizens’ or experts’ world views. Although there is now a growing body of anthropological work in technical fields such as international human rights law, finance and artificial intelligence, this work tends to focus more on the experts—the central bankers and the computer scientists—and ironically enough, to ignore the social movements that are now powerfully challenging those experts. Theoretical work in science and technology studies admonishes experts to practice humility and listen to publics, but provides relatively little concrete guidance on how this might be done.

Yet anthropologists, scholars of science and technology studies and legal scholars have much to contribute to better understanding the points of contact, confrontation, alliance and misunderstanding between experts and citizen movements, and to finding new ways for citizens and experts to engage more meaningfully with one another in a global context. Such work must begin with understanding these epistemic communities, but must also go beyond description to experimentation aimed at deriving solutions. That will also require scholars—who are also experts of a kind—to experiment with how best to reach across the barriers of their own disciplinary communities.

In spring and summer 2021, Northwestern Buffett Institute for Global Affairs, the Department of Law & Anthropology and the Research Group ‘Aiming toward the Future’ at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, and the Max Planck Institute for Comparative and International Private Law will co-host a virtual seminar on **Law, Technology and Social Movements: Global Citizens and Experts**. This seminar, directed by Annelise Riles, Maria Sapiñoli, Marie-Claire Foblets and Ralf Michaels, will bring together a cohort of doctoral and post-doctoral students in anthropology, science and technology studies and legal studies to deliberate the following research questions:

- How are governance regimes (regulatory systems, technical systems, international institutions) now being shaped by social movements globally?
- How are experts perceiving and responding to concerns generated by social movements concerning emerging digital technologies?
- How do social movement actors perceive their role in shaping regulation in areas such as finance and digital technology?
- How should the experts who work within regulatory and technical regimes engage social movements?

- How should citizens and citizen movements engage with expert systems of governance?
- How can emerging digital technologies be harnessed to foster better forms of engagement between the public and experts, between social movements and international institutions?
- How can the disciplines of law, anthropology and science and technology studies contribute to fostering a more transformative dialogue between experts and citizen movements?

Seminar participants will work collaboratively to survey existing literatures to produce a comprehensive research syllabus on these questions. Participants will also produce a white paper that proposes a new and more robust role for scholars in helping to bring together experts and publics in the governance process across national borders. Finally, this seminar will serve as a robust cross-disciplinary training and networking opportunity for junior scholars in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere.

The seminar will meet once every 2 weeks for 10 weeks beginning April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and will involve approximately six hours of preparatory work per week outside of these meetings.

Graduate students and postdocs interested in participating in the seminar are invited to submit the following materials to Liz Jackson at [elizabeth.jackson@northwestern.edu](mailto:elizabeth.jackson@northwestern.edu) by February 28<sup>th</sup>.

- A brief email describing:
  - Your interest in the seminar's theme.
  - The stage you are at in your research program, indicating dates and sites of any existing or anticipated ethnographic fieldwork.
- A dissertation abstract or short summary of your current research topic.
- An academic CV.