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Call for Papers

**The next Hundred Years' Crisis -
The Realist Tradition in IR as *(the) Enlightenment?***



Workshop Convenor:

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Submission Deadline of individual papers: 13th January 2019

Rationale and background of the theme: realism as a misunderstood tradition in IR

The realist tradition in International Relations is maybe the most misunderstood one. Most IR scholars, may they be in the liberal, constructivist or post-structuralist camp, think (or just argue, even they should know it better) that 'Realism' is an American theory which has evolved from the beginning and during the Cold War in the U.S. as a guideline for policy-makers to contain the Soviet Union, to establish a bipolar balance of power-configuration within the international system, and to prolong the 'unipolar moment' of the U.S. after the end of the Cold War. Mostly in mainstream IR theory textbooks and articles, it is suggested that realists build a monolithic bloc, that they all are conservative and backward-oriented and share an affirmative understanding of power politics and just think and argue in terms of material power capabilities and categories of the national interest, and that they have no sense of ethics/morality in politics, of liberal values/democracy, or of any form of political integration.

What is really alarming is the fact that Neoconservatives in the U.S., or Russian academic realists supporting the Putin regime, or Chinese diplomats claim realism as a political agenda

and suggest that realist thinking provides policy-makers with the core insights guiding and shaping foreign policy into appropriate and successful directions in times of either a ‘war on terror’, or the decline of the Western liberal order, or power shifts in Eastern Europe, Eurasia, or East Asia. As a consequence, since decades, realism is associated with reckless power politics, with ideologies such as revisionism and nationalism, and with populism – exactly those social movements and forces the great majority of transatlantic realists since the beginning of our academic discipline in 1919 *actually* have been/are arguing and warning *against*, and try at least to critically engage with if not to overcome by means of publicly naming and shaming governments and states pursuing crude, violent, war-prone strategies. Just think on John Mearsheimer’s and Stephen Walt’s critique against Iraq War, or Hans J. Morgenthau’s opposition against the Vietnam War.

Claim and aim: revisiting realism as IR/FPA theory and a political reformist agenda

Anyway, what we call the “Western liberal order” is in its deepest crisis ever (maybe self-inflicted, as Mearsheimer argues), with many analogies and parallels to the late 1920s and 1930s. It seems that Edward H. Carr’s *Twenty Years’ Crisis*, published 80 years ago in 1939, is back. And the question, then, is whether there is an expectable next Twenty, Eighty, or Hundred Years’ Crisis in international politics? Given that the realist tradition in IR was founded exactly in this interwar period in Europe against the background of WWI, the failure of the League of Nations and Weimar democracy, and the rise of anti-Semitism and totalitarianism, it is time and of added value to rethink realism what it was and still *is*: a particular - *realist* – kind, or version, of *the Enlightenment* teaching us, on the one hand, something about the inevitable dynamics of power as main social force driving and shaping any social relations within the political sphere, and how to analyze the ‘laws’ of power politics, but, on the other hand, also offering us a guideline to deal with these dynamics and crises coming along with this, and suggesting alternative ways to stabilize the international order, to defend Western democracy at home and to rescue liberal values *in line* with the insuperable but well-known rules of benign power politics.

In other words: Realists claim to understand and analyze power as the main driving factor in politics, and at the same time to draw prudent lessons of the past for a better future, and to offer a *reformist political agenda*. Consequently, the main focus of this workshop is whether and how far realism can serve as a theoretical but also deeply political enterprise in terms of an *enlightenment tradition* in a threefold manner, namely *rescuing* liberalism from its rationalism, from ideology and moralism, and from its naïve blindness and illusions, as Michael C. Williams, who, inspired by Ira Katznelson’s figure of ‘political studies enlightenment’ (presented in *Desolation and Enlightenment: Political Knowledge After Total War, Totalitarianism, and the Holocaust*, 2003), understands the realist thinking of the interwar European émigré scholars neither as antipode nor enemy of liberalism, but quite the contrary as a particular kind of *renewing* liberalism, and an intellectual and political project, or reform agenda for the future Western liberal democracies and domestic and foreign policies, argues (in his 2013 EJIR article *In the beginning: The International Relations enlightenment and the ends of International Relations theory*). And whether realism can help us to make sense of recent tempestuous developments, but also whether realism offers normative and critical perspectives against reckless power politics.

Possible paper topics & themes

Hence, the aim of the workshop that brings together realists and critical voices is threefold: **(i)** to rethink and (re)define the state of the art of the realist tradition in IR and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), and to identify trajectories, different branches and future developments within the multifaceted realist camp; **(ii)** to reconstruct and contextualize the origins and history of the realist tradition as an *enlightenment* movement (and/or a distinctively 20th century European tradition); **(iii)** and to present different - classical, neo-/structural, or neoclassical - realist visions of international order and states' foreign and security policies, and to discuss political challenges for stability and peace in Europe/Eurasia, and possible scenarios and solutions.

The workshop convenor therefore invites to submit papers that address the following issues and themes from different perspectives within the realist tradition. The plan is to organize at least 3 or a maximum of 5 panels (4 paper givers, a discussant and a chair each):

(1) The history & variety of the realist tradition in Europe and the U.S. in the 20th century

- Who are the key figures in realism, and in which political, academic/intellectual and institutional contexts have they been socialized? What are the differences and commonalities of realist approaches and thinkers within the tradition?
- Is there any *enlightenment* movement in the realist tradition in IR? What do you understand by the term: a rather theoretical, a rather political enterprise, or both?
- And if so, who are the proponents of the *realist version of the Enlightenment*, and why are they, and what has been/is the purpose of these thinkers?

(2) The explanatory power of realism as a theory of international politics & foreign policy

- How far do realist theories help us making sense of and understand the ongoing dynamics of/within international politics? What about the configuration within the system in terms of polarity, the idea of a balance of power or a Concert of Europe, and other neo-realist core assumptions? Are they still valid today?
- How far do realist theories help us to analyze the foreign policies of great, middle sized and small powers' foreign policies in Europe and Eurasia?
- Which role do material power considerations, (mis)perceptions (of threat, other states' intentions, power capabilities etc.), ideology and geopolitical power shifts play in the foreign policy decision-making process?

(3) The political and theoretical relevance of realism today

- Is there a return of revisionism, nationalism and power competition in Europe and Eurasia? If so, how do these developments become manifest and observable? And why are revisionist states revisionist (again)? How can realism and realists identify these dynamics, and deal with?
- If there are (again) revisionist states, what does this mean for the European/Eurasian security architecture (NATO, OSCE) and the EU/European Integration Process?
- And what does the power of ideology mean for the realist tradition in IR/FPA, understood as a theoretical but also deeply political enterprise aiming for rescuing liberalism from rationalism, from ideology and moralism, but also from a naïve blindness and idealist illusions? What are the political and theoretical challenges, but also incentives for realism as *(the) Enlightenment theory in IR* in the 21st century?