The ontological status of culture and emotions in politics and IR
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Call for papers

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Emotions and culture have always been present in the study of politics and IR, but their presence has mostly been implicit: either as the silent ‘other’ of rationality – the big ‘R’ of mainstream International Relations, or the black box where anything left unexplained by other concepts gets shuffled in as ‘ideational extra’. ‘Culture’ as a generic category has fared better as a central notion (next to ‘norms’ and ‘identity’) in constructivist IR as well as in a variety of approaches in comparative politics, from classical works to contemporary research on strategic and organisational cultures, cooperation and conflict and the like. Nevertheless, we feel there has been not enough reflection on how both emotions and culture relate to other fundamental categories of social theory, such as structure, norm, identity, discourse and power.

For the three main strands of IR theory, fear, trust, and affection/friendship have figured most


2 E.g. Ruth Benedict, Patterns of Culture (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1934); Margaret Mead and Rhoda Metraux (eds), The Study of Culture at a Distance (University of Chicago Press, 1953); Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations (Princeton University Press, 1963); Lucian W. Pye and Sidney Verba (eds), Political Culture and Political Development (Princeton University Press, 1965).


prominently in the respective foci of Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism. While there have been plentiful applications of emotional categories in the analysis of comparative and international politics, this engagement has generally been either relatively a-theoretical or focusing on specific phenomena in foreign policy analysis and world politics (such as conflict, trauma, identity, and security community), at least until recently. An important forum aimed specifically at theorising emotions in world politics appeared in *International Theory* in 2014, taking stock of the disciplinary developments up until that point and outlining the main theoretical difficulties related to the systematic analytical engagement with emotions in IR. The literature on emotional states in (international) politics has positively burgeoned in recent years, notably in relation to the intensified scholarly interest in the study of ontological security of states and other collective political bodies. It is now commonplace to suggest that states operate with emotions, frame their actions and reactions in emotional terms on everyday basis. The study of emotional states and their political consequences has

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12 For a comprehensive overview of the respective literature and related debates, see the recent special issue of *Cooperation and Conflict* (2016), guest edited by Catarina Kinnvall and Jennifer Mitzen.
become legitimate in IR as the links between emotions, personal and social identities and structures are explored with increasing depth and theoretical sophistication in the discipline.

When it comes to culture, it would certainly be incorrect to say that this concept is not sufficiently developed in political science and IR, or that it is not properly conceptualised. However, in spite of the existing critical reflection, there still seems to exist a tendency to essentialise cultural difference both as a variable and an ontological category. This issue was brought to the fore, in particular, by the recent rise of decolonial scholarship, postulating the need to overcome Eurocentrism and cultivate sensitivity to cultural difference. In our view, this and other considerations make it imperative to revisit culture both as a foundational ontological category and as a variable affecting political outcomes.

The proposed workshop brings into focus three core themes that the conceptually innovative and empirically rich scholarship on emotions and culture in politics and IR have highlighted as particularly challenging: (1) the individual-collective nexus of political emotions, (2) the agency-structure problem as applied to the study of emotions and culture, and (3) the methodology of researching emotions and culture in politics and IR. We bring these major concerns to a particular focus on our empirical research area of Russian and East European studies, but equally welcome contributions with purely theoretical and/or methodological emphases, or those situated empirically elsewhere. We are particularly interested in the emotional legacies in the politics of transitional justice, as well as in the critical analysis of (hidden) essentialism in the use of culture as an explanatory category in IR. The EU’s communication of its emotional state(s) after the major upheaval created by Brexit provides rich material for comparative case studies with post-Soviet Russia and contemporary Turkey. What kind of behaviour gets justified on the basis of emotions and culture in contemporary politics? What legitimizing value is attributed to them by various actors in the international stage? Can emotions and culture be researched as anything but discourses and practices at the level of political collectives and their complex interactions?

The workshop will take place at the University of Tartu on 21–22 April 2017. Paper abstracts (no more than 300 words) are due by 1 March by e-mail (viacheslav.morozov@ut.ee). Limited financial support is available from the UPTAKE consortium, but participants are encouraged to secure their own funding to cover travel and accommodation expenses.

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