

Editor Forewords

Political Memory, Emotions, and the Politics of Exclusion in IR

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A growing body of literature has emphasized that emotions, memory and exclusion constitute a fundamental element of world politics. Nevertheless, these themes have continued to receive relatively limited attention within mainstream International Relations (IR) scholarship (Crawford, 2000; Bleiker and Hutchison, 2008; Mercer, 2010; Hutchison and Bleiker, 2014; Pace and Bilgic, 2018). The dominance of rational-institutional and empiricist-positivist approaches in IR has constrained analytical engagement with emotional and affective dimensions, which are often framed as subjective, irrational, and methodologically elusive. Yet over at least the past two decades, scholarships on emotions, affect, and political memory have expanded significantly. This body of literature demonstrates that emotions operate as social and political practices that play a central role in the formation of collective identities and historically constituted global power relations (Ahmed, 2014; Berenskoetter, 2014; Hutchison, 2016).

Emotions function as mechanisms that bind political subjects to particular memories, draw boundaries between “us” and “them,” and shape what is deemed morally and politically meaningful in world politics. At the same time, memories of colonialism, structural violence, and the emotions of affected communities such as grief, political anger, existential anxiety, and past trauma are frequently excluded from mainstream IR discourse and international policymaking. This limited engagement with emotional dimensions has direct implications for how political memory is understood to operate through mechanisms of selection and exclusion in International Relations, shaping affective orientations toward particular political subjects. Certain historical experiences are activated, legitimized, and granted international recognition, while others are silenced, depoliticized, or marginalized (Olick, 2007; Subotic, 2019). These processes generate moral hierarchies, understood as normative structures that determine which forms of suffering are recognized as worthy of concern, which victims are considered legitimate, and which historical experiences are deemed politically relevant by dominant powers (Pace and Bilgic, 2018).

These dynamics are evident across a range of contemporary political contexts. The reactivation of Chinese memories of Japanese imperialism following the election of Prime Minister Takaichi illustrates how historical wounds are mobilized as sources of political legitimacy and as an ontological foundation of the state. Similarly, the invocation of European colonialism in the speeches of Global South leaders in international forums

demonstrates how historical memory is deployed to contest structural inequalities within the postcolonial global order (Bhambra, 2014).

The sharpest contrast can be observed in divergent global emotional and political responses to conflicts and humanitarian crises. Widespread Western solidarity with Ukraine illustrates how emotions such as grief, anger, and empathy are mobilized to provide moral justification for international sanctions and political intervention. In the United States and parts of Europe, populist far right group actively exploit fear within discursive and social practices (Koschut, 2017). By contrast, protracted suffering in other contexts such as Palestine is frequently framed as a “chronic” or “intractable” conflict, resulting in empathic fatigue and marginalization within the global moral landscape (Bashir and Goldberg, 2014). These disparities reflect a global empathy gap, in which certain forms of suffering are articulated as universal humanitarian crises, while others are treated as peripheral tragedies. Such patterns point to the enduring intersection between emotional exclusion, political power, and postcolonial historical relations (Bhambra, 2014; Kinnvall, 2019).

The first two articles examine how political memory influences commitments in different institutional settings. It begins with “NATO’s Strategic Ambiguity under Trump: Fallibilism, Alliance Dynamics and Strategic Amnesia” by Trevor Graham Ongom, Agfajrina C. Pamungkas, and Try Danuwijaya that places political memory within the study of alliance politics. The article illustrates how Trump’s fallibilist leadership influences collective defense commitments among NATO’s members, thereby producing what is introduced as a strategic amnesia. The article titled “Affective Pragmatism: Political Memory, and Indonesia’s Selective Humanitarianism in Refugee Governance” by Atin Prabandari, Balya A. Segara, and Emma Seruni Ketaren introduces the concept of affective pragmatism to explain how political memory and emotions shape Indonesia’s response to refugees amidst the tension between humanitarian commitments and border security concerns.

Bongki Sabian and Mohamad Rosyidin’s article entitled “Transfiguring “Asia”: Curatorial Discourse in the 20th Jogja-NETPAC Asian Film Festival” examines how curatorial discourses in the Jogja-NETPAC Asian Film Festival construct the identity of “Asia”, thereby producing uneven hierarchies of recognition. Meanwhile, Pramono et.al. in “Political Memory, Economic Sovereignty, and New Dependencies: Indonesia’s Downstreaming and Energy Transition in the Midst of Foreign Investment” discuss how collective memory as a global supplier of raw materials, the historical experience of colonial extraction, and long-term economic dependency influence Indonesia’s downstreaming and energy transition policies. Finally, Sutan et.al. in “Narrative and Operational Communication on X: A Content Analysis of the Global Sumud Flotilla’s Transnational Activism for Palestine” demonstrate how digital communication on the Global Sumud Flotilla’s official X account produces transnational activism for Palestine. Although the article did not specifically focus on political memory, it shows how emotions, narratives, and affective solidarity are shaped and sustained through digital connective action. We hope that this issue contributes to deepening our understanding on how

political memory, emotions, and the politics of exclusion reshape identity, solidarity, and contemporary global politics.

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