

Laclau's Contribution to IR: Rethinking Core Concepts

Theory Workshop, Kiel University Research Group on International Political Sociology

15 – 16 April 2016

Kiel University

Workshop Description:

Over the past 30 years since the publication of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, the Essex School of discourse theory has established itself as somewhat of a staple in discourse research and political theory more generally. An ever growing number of empirical studies and theoretical works testify to the livelihood of this research program.

This stands somewhat in contrast to the field of international Relations (IR), in which the vast majority of studies applying discourse as a core theoretical concept relies mainly on approaches other than the Essex School (Foucault, Derrida). This is not to say that Laclau and Mouffe have been entirely neglected in IR, but their quite elaborate theoretical framework has been put to use mainly in analyses of domestic politics and only recently in IR (as well as in neighboring fields like critical geopolitics) by a still small but growing number of studies. Studies on different topics such as climate change, human rights and international integration, international hegemonies, reconciliation, international technological discourses, international organizations such as ASEAN and the EU, international law, the U.S. "war on terror" and German foreign policy have demonstrated that discourse theory can produce new insights on important questions in IR. At the same time, these studies have, for the most part at least, demonstrated the added value of discourse theory mainly in "empirical" studies.

This workshop takes a different, more conceptual, perspective. We invite innovative and original contributions that focus not so much on individual "cases" or other substantial issues but rather explore more general core concepts in IR and IR theory from an Essex School perspective with the aim of systematically working out what such an approach can add to our understanding. To give a better idea on what degree of abstraction we have in mind, here are a few examples:

- Contributions to the workshop could for instance explore concepts from *social theory* underlying theoretical approaches in IR, like agency/structure, subjectivity, system, etc.
- Equally, concepts that try to grasp a set of important *substantive issues* in IR and the social sciences more generally. Examples for such concepts would be
 - o peace, cooperation, conflict, war/violence, security (Stengel), sovereignty, anarchy.
 - o power, authority, control, dominance, hegemony (in the IR sense of the term) or leadership;
 - o crisis,
 - o democracy, justice, ideology, nationalism;
 - o globalization/denationalization
- Another possibility would be to focus on the *entities* inhabiting global politics like the state, international organizations or non-state actors.
- Papers could equally explore the relationship between the Essex School and theoretical concepts used by other approaches like *gender, race* or (the construction of) *space* or *norms, time, ideas, roles, cultures* or *identity* or examine the importance of, say, *emotions*.
- Finally, contributions to the workshop could attempt to develop an Essex School approach to *research material* other than (written) speech, for instance how to analyze images (e.g. visual hegemonies) or integrate other factors relevant for the meaning of spoken language like intonation, pauses, facial expressions.

The idea is to offer an interpretation of how these broad concepts could be approached from a discourse theoretical perspective and work out how debates within IR theory can profit from an engagement with discourse theory.

- For instance, what can we gain if we rethink *conflict* from an Essex school perspective?
- How would we conceptualize *security* and securitizing processes from a discourse theoretical perspective and what would be the benefit for existent approaches in conventional as well as Critical Security Studies?
- How do we deal with the widely employed notion of *crisis*?

- How would we understand *nationalism* or *identity* from a Laclauian perspective and what is to be gained?
- How do we conceive of *agency* and/or *structure*, subjectivity and discourse?
- How is *critique* possible from an Essex School perspective, if at all, and what, if anything, does that in turn mean for IR poststructuralism? Closely related to this issue is of course the question of *ethics* in IR.
- How can we integrate *feminist and postcolonial perspectives* with the Essex School and (why) should we?

These proposals are by no means meant to be exhaustive, and we are open to alternative suggestions. In concentrating on broader conceptual rather than substantial issues, we hope that the papers will speak to a wider range of issues and conceptual debates in IR than empirical studies of individual cases could. We will aim at combining a selection of reworked workshop papers into a special section or issue to submit to a general IR journal.

To examine these questions from a theoretical point of view, we invite **original contributions** by IR researchers and political theorists alike. Although mainly speaking to the IR community, thinking through such broad concepts should have, even if within an IR context, repercussions for political theory, the humanities and social sciences more generally. Signifiers like justice, crisis or peace clearly have relevance beyond IR, and theoretical concepts like gender, race, space and so on are important in the social sciences more generally. Thus, we hope, that we can make a more general contribution beyond the narrow confines of IR.

Timeline:

15 November 2015 Submission of Abstracts

15 March 2016 Submission of Papers

Venue: t.b.a.

Workshop Conveners:

Prof. Dr. Dirk Nabers, Kiel University Research Group on International Political Sociology (KUIPS), Kiel University, nabers@ips.uni-kiel.de

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Preliminary Program:

14 April 2016

Arrival of participants

15 April 2016

9.00 am – 9.15 am	Welcome, introduction
9.15 am – 10.45 am	Slot I
10.45 am – 11.15 am	<i>Coffee break</i>
11.15 am – 12.45 pm	Slot II
12.45 pm – 2.00 pm	<i>Lunch break</i>
2.00 pm – 3.30 pm	Slot III
3.30 pm – 4.00 pm	<i>Coffee break</i>
4.00 pm – 5.30 pm	Slot IV
7 pm	<i>Conference dinner</i>

16 April 2016

9.00 am – 10.30 am	Slot V
10.30 am – 11.30 am	Discussion
11.30 am	End of conference

Departure of participants