

Problematising the Relevance and Potentialising the Possibilities of Political Marxism in 2022

Wednesday, 21 June 2023 15:00 (1h 30m)

Since its inception in the Brenner debate in the late 1970s, Political Marxism (PM) has been the target of much criticism from many corners. The denunciations of the framework have revolved around four partly distinct and partly complementary critiques: economism, gender blindness, Eurocentrism, and disparaging of racialised aspects of socio-economic development. At the same time, however, the framework has also been going through fruitful intra-paradigm debates, for example around the much-critiqued concept of market dependency, the importance of international dynamics and foreign policy making, and the status of agency in historical political economy accounts.

The panelists all share a broad commitment to the continued relevance of PM as an approach that can, due to its radically historicist foundations, illuminate central aspects of political and socio-economic dynamics of change on all levels of social practices and structures. The scholars work on radically distinct questions and time periods, yet have felt that PM or radical historicism opens up the possibility of asking highly original questions and answering them in an original and ambitious way. The purpose of the panel is to showcase the continued vitality of the framework to fellow International Relations and Political Economy researchers through five specific research projects.

Kate Cherry's research title is 'The Making of Neoliberal Families: Social Conservatism and the Privatisation of Housing in Britain'. Part of her research project asks why the first wave family abolition movement failed during the permissive moment and how to read this through a radical historicist framework that problematises the reliance on market imperatives unable to escape the liberal imaginative. By asking these questions, she criticises PM for treating gender relations as epiphenomenal to capitalist social property relations, and questions whether radical historicism is capable of moving beyond that blindsiding.

Judith Koch's research is titled 'Still Splendid Isolation? Brexit in the Longue Purée of British Foreign Policy Exceptionalism', and it focuses on Brexit, studying it both from a Foreign Policy Analysis and a Political Economy perspective. Her framing of the question of why Brexit happened turns the conventional and popular paradigm on its head by asking why did the UK stay within the EU for as long as it did, and why did the strained relations between the two not lead to a Brexit before 2016? In this paper, she seeks to understand EU-UK relations through a radically historicist Foreign Policy Analysis.

Armando Van Rankin Anaya's research is titled 'The Making of Mexico: An International Political Sociology of Mexican Modernity'. His investigation aims to provide a large-scale reconstruction of the Mexican trajectory using a Geopolitical Marxist approach. The study applies the framework to the study of a colonial and racialised context thought to be beyond the purview of PM, thereby showing the relevance of the approach. Van Rankin Anaya's underlying claim is that the uniqueness of Mexico's modernity - modern state apparatus, capitalism, and nationalism/citizenship - is anchored in a set of historical specificities rooted in the conflictual Mexican trajectory built from the Spanish colonisation of Mesoamerican civilisations in the 16th century onwards.

Lauri von Pfaler's research is titled 'Social Relations and Geopolitics in the Making of a Scandinavian Inter-State System'. It provides a long-term reconstruction of the social and geopolitical changes constituting the current political geography of Northern Europe. This paper seeks to understand the role of the only recently feudalised and Christianised Scandinavian kingdoms in the feudalisation and Christianisation, the so-called 'Europeanisation', of the Baltic Sea, between the 12th and 14th centuries. It argues that the geo-socially specific feudal polities accumulated vast territories on various sides of the Baltic due to the interplay of three co-constitutive 'levels': 'internal' class relations, 'external' inter-Scandinavian geopolitical pressures, and the wider geo-social order of Northern Europe.

Samuel Parris's research is titled 'The Making of the New World: Franco-British Geopolitical Rivalry, Settler Colonialism, and the Early American Republic, 1624-1823'. He will present a paper titled 'Merchants

and the Colonial Origins of the American Revolution, 1624-1776'. It argues that previous explanations of the revolution, both fiscal-pressure and abolitionism based, leave fundamental questions about the revolution unanswered and suggests that to comprehend this transformation requires a PM-inspired, radical historicist assessment of the complex entanglements engendered by competing British and French social property regimes and strategies of colonialism in North America. The paper underlines the importance of the sidelined British interloping merchants in this process.

Track Classification: Historical Sociology and International Relations Working Group