

Taking Seriously the Unserious in Resistance: The subversive force of pop culture in non-Western states

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International Relations (IR) Studies considers itself a 'serious' discipline. As such, the political potential of popular cultural productions has been overlooked and become a footnote to more traditionally important matters within the field. In today's world where political leaders tweet and appear on podcasts and Saturday Night Live, where election campaigns and protest movements are carried out on digital platforms like YouTube and Instagram in collaboration with celebrities such as Taylor Swift and Cardi B, the strength of popular culture in political theorisation and political activism needs to be recognised. In fact, the entertainability and unseriousness of popular culture is precisely why it could be politically effective. Papers in this panel consider the question of 'How do different forms of popular culture subvert hegemony and resist political oppression?' from a diverse range of theoretical, empirical, and geographical perspectives. Panellists aim to explore how various forms of popular culture—such as vlogs, music, comedy, tourism and more—serves as a tool of resistance against ideological and political oppression in restrictive, non-liberal societies, ranging across North Korea, China, Russia, Iran, Egypt, Turkey and more, in non-violent, tacit, individual and creative ways, and how such resistance can play a role in reshaping and sometimes reinforcing forms of authority and control. Panellists wish to emphasise the importance of looking beyond the traditional perception of these popular cultural forms as mere entertainment, and call at this crucial moment where we envision the future of IR, that we take seriously the 'unserious' popular cultural productions in all their multiple and creative forms.

Note: This is part one of the proposed double panel. Our panellists' research is situated in various non-Western states ranging across North Korea, China, Russia, Egypt, India, Turkey and Iran, focusing on various forms of popular culture including vlogs, different genres of music, memes, comics and tourism products. Hence, we propose a double panel with the aim of covering different forms of popular culture across a variety of different geographical locations in the non-West in order to ascertain not just the similarities, but also the distinctions among these forms of popular culture and their political impacts within International Studies.

Track Classification: Post-Structural Politics Working Group