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# 11<sup>TH</sup> EXPLORATORY SYMPOSIA **RAPALLO**

27<sup>TH</sup>–30<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2024

EXCELSIOR PALACE HOTEL  
VIA SAN MICHELE DI PAGANA 8  
16035 RAPALLO, ITALY



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## VENUE

### **Excelsior Palace Hotel**

Via San Michele di Pagana 8  
16035 Rapallo, Italy

There is no specific working space assigned. The working groups gather in various common areas.

## WHEN DO WE NEED TO ARRIVE IN RAPALLO?

Participants will be expected to arrive in Rapallo on the afternoon of 27<sup>th</sup> October in time for the opening dinner (at 8 PM). They will be expected to depart in the afternoon 30<sup>th</sup> October. The symposia are self-organized: each symposium determines its own schedule while paying due attention to the timing of coffee breaks and lunches.

## HOW DO WE GET TO RAPALLO?

The EISA Symposia will be held at the Excelsior Palace Hotel (<http://www.excelsiorpalace.it/en/>) which is walking distance (one km) from Rapallo Train station. The closest airport is “Cristoforo Colombo” Genova International Airport (32 km from the hotel).

The easiest and most cost-effective way to reach the Excelsior is to take a shuttle bus between the airport and one of the Genova train stations, Principe or Brignole, see: <http://www.airport.genova.it/en/transportation-airport/>. This should take around 30 minutes.

You will then need to take a train from Genova Principe or Brignole to Rapallo (it takes between 30 and 60 minutes depending on which station you travel from). For further info on train schedules see: <https://www.trainline.eu/train-times/genoa-to-rapallo>.

Another possibility is to arrive at Milan airport. There are direct trains to Rapallo from Milan Central Station.

[#EISARapallo24](https://twitter.com/EISARapallo24)

# PROGRAMME SCHEDULE

## 27 OCTOBER

- Arrival of participants in the afternoon
- 8 PM Welcome dinner at the hotel restaurant

## 28 OCTOBER

- 7:00–10:30 Breakfast
- Morning: Panels with coffee break at 11:00 AM
- 1:00–2:30 PM Lunch
- Afternoon: Panels

## 29 OCTOBER

- 7:00–10:30 Breakfast
- Morning: Panels with coffee break at 11:00 AM
- 1:00–2:30 PM Lunch
- Afternoon: Panels
- 8:30 PM final dinner in town (not included in the conference fee)

## 30 OCTOBER

- 7:00–10:30 Breakfast
- Departures

# PANELS

## Participants

**Louise Ridden,**  
Tampere University

**Hannah Richards,**  
Cardiff University

**Luise Bendfeldt,**  
Uppsala University

**Emily Clifford,**  
Royal Holloway University  
of London

## ES2024-1

### Exploring 'Protection in IR': A New Research Agenda

#### Description

Ideas of protection litter both the academic literature and daily practice of International Relations (IR), yet protection itself – what it means, what it does, what it is – has so far eluded sustained and rigorous attention. The field of IR rests instead upon the central tenets of the state, power, sovereignty, and security, leaving protection largely implicit within these concepts. As four Early Career Researchers based across Europe and inquiring broadly after the politics of nonviolence, bordering, national defence, and gendered harm, we find this silencing curious. In our respective areas of IR, we have asked what this might do for practices of power and their associated knowledges. Our collaborative project takes to task the conceptual allusivity of protection by centring both its treatment in the discipline and, perhaps more crucially, how it might be reimagined following sustained, feminist inquiry. The purpose of our meeting at the EISA Exploratory Symposia is to begin preparing a Special Issue to address these aims, targeting the European Journal of International Relations (EJIR). We will centre questions such as: What is protection? Who can name, promise, and give it? How is protection instrumentalised, lived, and experienced? And what happens when conflicting narratives of protection meet?

This proposal builds from the early successes of our research agenda: firstly, the organisation and hosting of an externally funded workshop entitled Narrating Protection in IR: Questioning the (in)visibility of the inbetween at Uppsala University in January 2024; secondly, our upcoming section at EISA PEC 2024, S02: Protection in IR and Beyond; and thirdly, a collaborative 'Interventions' article on protection, set to be published in Autumn 2024 by Critical Studies on Security. We intend to use the four days of the Symposium to explore and plan a Special Issue that builds on these critical contributions, inviting empirically and theoretically varied research articles that explicitly problematise the concept of protection. During this time, we will establish a timeline

for the development of the Special Issue, further define the topic's scope, write a proposal for EJIR, and draft a call for papers. We will also use the Symposium to organise a workshop in which contributors to our Interventions piece can discuss developing their research papers. In so doing, we hope to grow our research network and further establish its contribution to scholarship in IR, demonstrating the need for comprehensive, feminist critique of protection as a concept, idea, experience, policy, and politics.

### Participants

**Ryan Beasley,**  
University of St Andrews

**Juliet Kaarbo,**  
University of Edinburgh

**Kai Oppermann,**  
Chemnitz University  
of Technology

**Karin Aggestam,**  
Lund University

**Sandra Destradi,**  
University of Freiburg

## ES2024-2

### Leaders in the Multiverse: Advancing Counterfactual Analysis in Global Politics

#### Description

On the campaign trail, Donald Trump has repeatedly engaged in counterfactual analysis about leaders (specifically, himself) claiming that if he were still president, Russia would not have invaded Ukraine in 2022 and the conflict in Gaza would not have happened in 2023. Is Trump right? A New York Times reporter contacted us to ‘fact-check’ Trump’s counterfactual claims. His article then quoted us<sup>1</sup> because our recent research<sup>2</sup> touched on Trump’s assertions about Russia and focused on another counterfactual – how the U.S. would have responded to Russia’s invasion if Trump, rather than Biden, was president. This project builds on that research, extending our argument that counterfactuals are especially suited for investigating the impact individual leaders have in global politics.

Attention to leaders in International Relations (IR) has been growing,<sup>3</sup> and leaders have long been a focus in Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), yet the counterfactual method is rarely used.

For this project, we argue that counterfactuals are not only good for leader analysis generally, but they can also uniquely support recent advances in IR and FPA research – such as those examining leaders and populism,<sup>4</sup> gender,<sup>5</sup> emotions,<sup>6</sup> time,<sup>7</sup> and how leaders ‘break bad’.<sup>8</sup>

These advances all reject structural assumptions, instead embracing the contingency of international outcomes by foregrounding the agency of policymakers. This aligns squarely with counterfactual analysis, as it challenges the ‘certainty of hindsight bias’ which reinforces deterministic readings of the past.<sup>9</sup> Better understanding of counterfactual logic can also help researchers, journalists, and voters judge the legitimacy of counterfactual claims made about leaders, as with Trump’s assertions about himself.

Counterfactuals are “subjunctive conditional[s] in which the antecedent is known or supposed for purposes of argument to be false.”<sup>10</sup> Such thought experiments are intrinsic to any statements linking causes to effects, because causal arguments imply that outcomes would have been different with

different causes.<sup>11</sup> Counterfactual methods have been used in a diverse range of scholarship in history,<sup>12</sup> but remain relatively rare and somewhat controversial in IR and FPA. Critics claim there is no way of systematically researching events that did not happen, dismissing counterfactual reasoning as unscientific “flights of fancy.”<sup>13</sup> Yet the logics of counterfactual versus factual case study research are fundamentally similar, as both seek empirical implications of theoretical arguments linking causes to effects, and good counterfactuals must follow methodological criteria to enable systematic analyses.<sup>14</sup>

Counterfactual methodology, we argue, is ideally suited for the study of leaders. In particular, they centralise the question of ‘actor dispensability’ – whether different leaders would have behaved differently in the same decision context.<sup>15</sup> Counterfactuals that change who leads can be targeted, as “imagining a different leader minimizes the number of historical factors that must be changed to construct a compelling counterfactual.”<sup>16</sup> Good counterfactual analysis also requires clear theoretical arguments about how a different antecedent would have led to different outcomes. This is provided by a vibrant and extensive history of FPA research on leaders<sup>17</sup>, in particular on how their traits, beliefs, and experiences affect foreign policies and policymaking processes, allowing us to systematically link counterfactual changes in leaders to their impacts in IR.

Because counterfactual analysis manipulates narrowly targeted factors, our project can advance research on leaders in specific ways. Counterfactuals allow scholars to manipulate individual personality characteristics or other leader differences, for example, and demonstrate their asserted real-world effects. This can further isolate the foreign policy impacts of specific leader characteristics in different contexts. For example, work on the personality traits of populist leaders<sup>18</sup> has still to explore how specific traits interact with political contexts to affect the foreign policymaking process, a missing ingredient in populism research.<sup>19</sup> Similarly gender may interact in particular contexts with personality traits, like leaders’ self-confidence, despite evidence suggesting there are no systematic personality differences between male and female leaders.<sup>20</sup> Finally, counterfactuals can hone analyses of the effects of specific changes within leaders over time, such

as shifts in their orientations to power or their beliefs about the world.<sup>21</sup>

Because counterfactuals not only allow but actually encourage such narrowly targeted analyses, to minimize unintended ‘ripple effects’, they are especially beneficial to these cutting-edge research initiatives.

Our project will harness this untapped potential of counterfactual methodology for scholarship on leaders, helping to guide and accelerate recent advancements, demonstrate best practices around their use, and establish counterfactuals more firmly as a valuable method in FPA and IR. Building on our recent collaborative article, the exploratory symposium will prepare proposals for an EWIS workshop and an authors’ workshop, aiming to develop a Special Issue (SI) proposal for a leading IR journal. Contributions to the SI will use counterfactual methods to generate new case studies of the foreign policy impact of individual leaders drawn from a broad range of world regions. The SI will critically reflect on counterfactual methodology, evaluate how counterfactuals compare to more established methods in IR and FPA, and provide clear guidance for effective use of counterfactuals in leader research.

### Participants

**Rafael Biermann,**  
Friedrich Schiller University Jena

**Nicolò Fasola,**  
University of Bologna

**Ivica Petrikova,**  
Royal Holloway University  
of London

**Géza Tasner,**  
Friedrich Schiller University Jena

**Lea Zuliani,**  
Friedrich Schiller University Jena

## ES2024-3

### Patron-Client Relations in World Politics

#### Description

The concept of Patron-Client Relations (PCRs) was re-discovered by International Relations scholars during the Cold War, to describe and analyse the strongly hierarchical dependency relations that the two superpowers tried to establish across the globe – in order to dominate over less powerful client states, avoid direct confrontation with one another, and ultimately offset the balance of power in their favour. Well-known examples included Soviet Union-Cuba and United States-South Korea relations. The mechanisms of PCRs were so essential to the unfolding of Cold War dynamics that, when the latter came to an end, so did the use of PCR as a framework for scientific enquiry.

Yet PCRs still permeate world politics today. The Cold War setting is gone, but great power patronhood is not. Not only do some Cold War relationships persist – as the one between the United States and Israel –, but also new ones have emerged. For example, Russia acts as the patron of Belarus, the United States tries to exert patronage over Georgia, and China is the patron of Myanmar. With the re-emergence of great power competition, the scramble for clients has intensified – as the case of Ukraine demonstrates. Hence, revisiting the concept of PCRs would help to explain current trends in international relations.

But the PCR framework needs updating. Existing scholarship on PCRs is state-centric and neglects the fact that non-state actors, such as international organisations or civil society organisations, may also become patrons or clients. This phenomenon appears to have gained prominence in recent decades. In some regions, such as the Middle East and North Africa, the fragmentation of sovereignty and statehood invited states such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran to establish new forms of PCRs with non-state actors such as local militias to enlarge their sphere of influence. The literatures on surrogate and proxy warfare employ the PCR terminology frequently, but underestimates the distinct client preferences and agendas and thus the relational dimension of PCRs. Moreover, today we witness

the emergence of non-state patrons of non-state clients – e.g., powerful terrorist groups such as the Islamic State supporting local affiliates worldwide. It is also worth noting that PCRs are not always bilateral: there exist complex patron-client networks that, albeit usually centred on one patron, involve a multitude of clients. That is the case of the United Kingdom and its Commonwealth relationships.

Very few publications have tried to move beyond the narrow Cold War usage of the PCR framework to analyse contemporary world politics, but they are largely case studies applying the concept very loosely. Overall, the terms ‘patron’ and ‘patronage’ appear frequently in IR literature but remain largely unspecified. Scholarship lacks a systematic conceptualisation and operationalisation of the PCR phenomenon and has failed to delineate its contours with respect to neighbouring concepts (e.g., alliances, clientelism). Comparative or theory-driven approaches are rare. This leaves plenty of room for the refinement of PCR as an analytical category, to the benefit of deeper empirical analysis.

We want to fill in these gaps by putting together an edited volume that unpacks PCRs in contemporary world politics. The book’s aim is twofold: first, to conceptualise, define, and operationalise PCRs, in order to strengthen the concept’s theoretical contours and improve its employability for empirical analysis; second, the book intends to illuminate the multifaceted nature of PCRs in today’s global political landscape by applying our theoretical model to diverse.

### Participants

**Jonathan Luke Austin,**  
University of Copenhagen

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**Anna Leander,**  
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**Davide Sparti,**  
European University Institute

**Felix Roesch,**  
University of Sussex

## ES2024-4

### Time Dimensions, Improvisation, Political Practice

#### Description

The newly established research group comes together to discuss options for further collaborations and joint publications, following-up their meeting at the EISA EWIS workshop at Istanbul, July 3–5, 2024. The main focus is on the question of how to act politically under conditions of uncertainty while avoiding utopian or dystopian imaginaries; i.e., while maintaining, and not sus-pending, the time dimensions of past, present, and future that are ontologically irreducible for political practice. Practice is always, as the sociologist Alfred Schuetz and the philosopher André Gorz emphasise, acting and drafting consequences into the future while discerning ‘unrealized opportunities which lie dormant in the recesses of the present’ (Gorz). A crucial way for this anticipation which renders practice always uncertain, but keeps the time dimensions of past, present, and future alive, seems to be “improvisation” (for example in music) as an action model: Playing/acting through improvising accounts for the time dimensions of past and present while playing/acting *into* the future. A proposition in this vein is an ontology of becoming (in contrast to an essentialist ontology) as necessary condition for improvisation. The outlined problematic is relevant for policy development in humanitarianism, climate politics, energy politics, migration politics, etc. because politicians and social actors must always consider the consequences of their action (in the sense of an ethics of responsibility according to Hans Jonas or Max Weber).

The outlined research questions will be explored from the perspectives of different disciplines, academic backgrounds, and work experiences. The group brings together theoretical and practical expertise and knowledge with regards international political theory, practice theory and International Relations IR, phenomenological theory, ethnographic theory and research practice, practice theory, social sciences epistemologies, and musicology. The objective of the group and their symposium meeting shall be to elaborate the precise research questions,

foci, and single contributions for a joint publication, preferably in form of a co-authored article or a Special Issue with a leading international journal. Importantly, we will seek to also use *Rapallo* to develop ideas for an 'improvisational' publication in and-of-itself, expanding beyond existing modes of academic publications and, wherever possible, also using the unique *Rapallo* experience to further break with existing norms for academic discussion: becoming an improvisational research-group ourselves.

A further point for discussion at the symposium will be to specify the practical policy field to which the theoretical and conceptual concerns and propositions as outlined shall be most fruitfully applied. Here, the group brings together many individual work experiences in human security, surveillance and data protection, diplomacy, global tech policy, political and social aspects of the Anthropocene, intellectual history, and identity politics, humanitarianism, and politics in the Middle East. Intense discussions will be needed to frame the empirical, practical perspective with which the theoretical questions and concerns shall be fused, preferably the former/the empirical driving the precise formulation of the latter/the theoretical research questions whose exploration shall again, reciprocally and normatively, elucidate and guide political practice.

#### Participants

**Monique Beerli,**  
Université de Genève

**Marsha Henry,**  
Queen's University Belfast

**Myfanwy James,**  
London School of Economics  
and Political Science

**Jethro Norman,**  
Danish Institute  
for International Studies

**Margot Tudor,**  
University of London.

#### ES2024-5

### Doing Security: Reconnecting the History and Practice of Humanitarian Risk

#### Description

Scholarly attention to the security risks navigated by humanitarian professionals has increased as a result of recent highly publicised attacks on hospitals and aid workers. Much of this IR literature has argued that these targeted attacks are due to a new era of military humanitarianism; i.e. humanitarians' proximity to or collaboration with military actors 'in the field', such as peacekeepers or state soldiers, is putting humanitarians at increased risk than in the past. This slippage – between the (supposedly) discrete fields of humanitarianism and militarism – is framed as a new and concerning dynamic, undermining the previous norms of protection that shielded humanitarians from harm. Targeted attacks have not only been viewed as a contravention of the international humanitarian law enshrined in the Geneva Conventions, but also held as demonstrative of (or, for some commentators, as confirmation) of the new depths of depravity and inhumanity of modern warfare and extremist paramilitary groups.

However, such analyses of humanitarian security are too often disconnected from the history of humanitarianism and the myriad formal and informal practices that humanitarians have always used to navigate risk. The slippage between military and humanitarian actors is not new to the twenty-first century, nor is the danger experienced by humanitarians in the field. In fact, military and humanitarian spheres have always been more porous than is commonly assumed, and aid work has always been dangerous. Indeed, organisations have often moralised the risks endured by their staff in fundraising campaigns, framing their deployment as a combination of sacrifice and necessity. If risk has always been baked into the core of humanitarian practice – a feature rather than a bug – what, if anything, is distinctive about the contemporary politics of humanitarian insecurity, and what can the past reveal about the contentious issue of security today?

To address these ahistorical issues in humanitarian research, this interdisciplinary project seeks to historically and

ethnographically interrogate how the staff of prominent humanitarian organisations have responded to the issue of their own (in)security in areas or situations understood as risky and calculated the ethics of remaining in the field. Whilst there has been quantitative scholarship attempting to challenge the idea of humanitarian risk as a ‘new’ type of threat, this literature has not yet explored the specific types of risk, nor the different techniques adopted by humanitarians. We will examine *how* and *why* aid workers have attempted to maintain access in the face of obstructions, threats, or physical violence. To this end, we will develop a more comprehensive understanding of how humanitarian (in)security – including the creation of techniques for protecting staff and/or continuing to operate – has been intrinsic to shaping hegemonic logics, priorities, and ethics within modern humanitarian organisations today.

This symposium aims to interrogate the global politics of humanitarian security management in an age of assumed insecurity. It does so by addressing the following questions:

- **STRATEGIES:** What strategies have humanitarian organisations and staff used to stay and ‘manage security’ in the field in the past? From which past practices or logics were these techniques adopted? What do these strategies tell us about the priorities and politics of humanitarian intervention? What effects have these strategies had on humanitarian/civilian relationships?
- **SECURITY:** How is risk understood within humanitarian organisations today, and how has this changed over time? How does this affect decision-making about continued presence in the field and strategies of protection? How have ideas of security impacted humanitarian professionals’ access to and relationships with affected populations?
- **ACTORS:** Who are the actors involved in framing and responding to humanitarian security? What do their experiences tell us about the politics of risk management in practice? If aid agents are being targeted for attacks, to what extent are their operations putting civilians at risk? What, if anything, is unique about the ways in which humanitarian actors react in contexts of risk?

## Participants

**August Danielson,**  
Linköping University.

**Constance Duncombe,**  
University of Copenhagen

**Kristin Anabel Eggeling,**  
University of Copenhagen

**Elsa Hedling,**  
LundUniversity

**Zhao Alexandre Huang,**  
Université Paris Nanterre

## ES2024-6

### Digital Sensibilities

#### Description

This Symposium initiates a new research group focused on advancing the emerging field of Digital International Relations (DIR) through our joint efforts to cultivate 'digital sensibilities' in International Relations (IR). In a time and a cultural moment saturated with digital media, such technologies are increasingly implicated in how social practices unfold, gain political significance, and come to bear upon global politics. Digital technologies play a dynamic and inevitably contested role in shaping international relations: their use and influence shifts across geo- and socio-political contexts, and across time. Their status as tools central to our daily lives, from that of the everyday to the machinations of high politics, is not unidirectional. Rather, digital technologies influence and are influenced by movement in a fluid process that informs how they are engaged with and situated within different political contexts. Yet how we as IR scholars understand these intersubjective dynamics remains largely connected to binary thinking that either foregrounds technological determinism in positioning digital technologies as an external force acting upon pre-existing sets of practices within IR or leans into the human as the only actant in a continual online-offline relationship. Through our exploratory symposium, we propose the adoption of 'digital sensibilities' to more effectively conceptualize the fluidity and complexity inherent in the relationship between digital technologies and global politics.

Our individual contributions to the DIR field intersect across diplomacy, phenomenological encounters with social media, and digital technologies (Danielson & Hedling, 2022; Duncombe, 2017, 2019; Eggeling & Adler-Nissen, 2021; Eggeling & Versloot, 2022; Hedling, 2024; Hedling & Bremberg, 2021; Huang, 2022; Huang & Wang, 2019). In instantiating our research group, we will extend our research agendas by pursuing an interdisciplinary approach that draws insights from fields such as political science, communication studies, sociology, philosophy, archaeology, anthropology, and computer science to further explore the dimensions of DIR. Through rigorous empirical research, theoretical inquiry, and critical analysis, we aim to lay bare the mechanisms through which digital technologies shape international relations and vice versa.

Our group has extensive informal research collaboration across the universities of Copenhagen and Lund where our core group is based, and we wish to formalize this work

in the context of the EISA, as we know each other from the EISA-PEC annual conferences and have in the past used the conference and other EISA for a (e.g. EWIS workshops) to engage with and comment on each other's research. We imagine that the DIR group will eventually be expanded and open

to anyone interested in this area. The purpose of the symposium is to initiate the new research group and to lay the groundwork for future collaborations and joint research projects. To build our 'digital sensibilities' research group, we will discuss the future of DIR by learning from advancements in fields adjacent to IR. For instance, digital sociology has reinvigorated sociological theory in the digital age by providing analytical tools to understand technologies and their integration into social worlds, social institutions and concepts of selfhood and embodiment and how they may be investigated, analysed, and understood (Marres, 2017). Digital humanities is another scholarly field in the intersection of computing or digital technologies and the humanities that has led to innovative research projects and has opened new avenues for inquiry in fields such as literature, history, linguistics, and philosophy (Svensson, 2010). Digital archaeology refers to the application of digital technologies and computational methods in archaeological research and practice (Zubrow, 2006). Through tools 3D modeling, remote sensing, and digital mapping archeologist can analyze, visualize, and interpret excavation sites, reconstruct ancient landscapes, analyze artifacts, and simulate past environments. These methodological breakthroughs are more than tools to collect or visualize data, they enable new ways of thinking about the social and political world from within these fields and they require sensibilities to match their possibilities. By contrast to the established fields of digital humanities and digital archeology, digital international relations are still a nascent field poised to deliver. Drawing from the successes in adjacent fields we ask: What do 'the digital' and 'international relations' bring to DIR? As the first output of our group, we have in mind an edited volume that will introduce 'digital sensibilities' as a trading zone and meeting place in IR and that invites interventions from different traditions to 'the digital'. We would like to use the symposium to discuss and develop a plan for this book project, but we also imagine that we will organize panels at EISA and ISA to nurture our research group.

## Participants

**Louise Fawcett,**  
University of Oxford

**Karoline Postel-Vinay,**  
National Foundation for Political  
Science (Sciences Po), Paris

**Noa Schonmann,**  
Leiden University

**Karen Smith,**  
Leiden University

**Ewan Stein,**  
University of Edinburgh

## ES2024-7

### Narrativizing Regions: Dialectical Paths to a World of Multiple Regionalizations

#### Description

Policymakers and scholars have long looked to regions as potential game-changers of what fundamentally constitutes international relations. Yet the significance of regional actors in shaping the course and dynamics of world politics remains largely a theoretical premise. How do regions actually shape world order? This project starts from the observation that so far it has proved difficult to demonstrate the effects of regional formations on world politics. Why? This puzzle is particularly important at a time of increasing fragmentation of the international scene.

The finger is often pointed at the elusiveness of the core concept 'region' that obstructs systematic, rigorous comparative analyses. Much intellectual effort has been spent across the years on defining and redefining 'region' and great strides have been made in developing ever-broader and more nuanced and flexible ways of coming to terms with this multifaceted social phenomenon. Yet, ontological debates continue to mire Regional Studies, rendering the field an analytical quicksand. Thompson *et al* recently scoped the range of large-N quantitative studies (2010–2020) to assess the extent of cumulation in conceptual development, empirical measurement, and substantive findings regarding the significance of regions in international relations. They concluded that "Overall, there is little consensus about either... [the] meaning or operationalization of region as a concept". Little wonder that "rarely are explanations of interstate relations embedded in a comparative regional perspective."

Given the lack of agreement on definition, designation, and delineation of regions, many opt to avoid arbitrariness by grasping at regions through the proxies of regional 'international organizations' or 'security complexes'. This approach has the merit of tapping into the classic repertoire of conspicuous formalized institutions of governance and regulation through which states commonly address issues of 'high politics' (security and trade) within the confines of fixed continental divisions. On the other hand, it raises the problem of highly limited case selection, constricting our thinking about the rich variety of regional phenomena. Recognizing the fluidity and multi-dimensionality of regional arrangements, scholars advanced in the 1990s the New Regionalism approach that looks at formal and informal groupings, set up by state and non-state actors, and engaging across a range of activity fields.

Yet, what remains common to 'old' and 'new' approaches in academic and policy circles alike is their 'closed' notions of regional phenomena: their conception of 'regions' as inherently emerging from some primordial social singularity and inevitably terminating in, or at least aspiring towards, some ultimate integration. The regionalist path is rooted in some sense of shared identity, which leads to denser patterns of exchange, interaction, cooperation, and institutionalized interdependence, and ultimately to integration into one socio-political community. The source and direction of 'regional' travel are one and the same: from idealized homogeneity to idyllic convergence.

Even those who recognize that there is more to regionalization than following the European model, still operate on a definition of regionalization as inherently integrative: regions as actors-in-the-making. It is in this sense that international regions are still expected to follow a specifically European mode of regionalization: one of ostensible progression from shared identity towards a set of normatively Liberal 'order' outcomes (specifically stability, prosperity, peace) by way of amiable cooperation, interdependence, formal institutions, sovereignty pooling and integration, culminating in the emergence of a harmonious world of homogenized region-states. Another contribution of the 1990s New Regionalism literature is the acknowledgment of the diversity of regionalization practices around the world and the necessity to speak of regionalisms in the plural and no longer in the singular. But again, broad consensus remains over one path of region-making: from a kernel of shared identity develops a future of unity. We point out that those observing an emerging 'World of Regions' effectively assume, and practically look to account for, the emergence of a world of *like*-regions, rather than a world of regional multiplicity.

This approach to studying 'like-regions' may well work for the purpose of comparative analysis, a prominent mode of inquiry in Regional Studies as a sub-field of Politics/International Relations. Asking how regions matter statistically indeed requires starting from a unified definition of 'like' region-objects that can stand as social scientific variables. Inquiring into the regional world of possibilities, rather than of probabilities, requires a different approach. In this sense we suggest that a key reason for the analytical dead-end identified above is the closed-ended way we have been thinking about the regional subject matter. We have been trapped in a meta-narrative about regionalization: the European-grown liberal meta-narrative that presents region-making as a story of integration, or at least increased cooperation.

We propose to take a temporary step back from this repertoire. Indeed, some regional narratives are not necessarily about shared governance and regulation. They can be about *mere coexistence* and we suggest that the way to make sense of such projects is by tuning in to the narrativizing practices of different regions. Liminality, as Bahar Rumelili defined it, can explain why some actors such as China or Brazil are more attracted to narratives of coexistence rather than integration. Being an “outsider” within one’s own regional neighborhood, as in the case of Israel or Japan, can also produce a differential from the meta-narrative of integration. They constitute counter-narratives to the dominant repertoire of international regionalism. Through a number of case studies, we hope to illuminate those alternative paths in region-making and broaden the field of analysis of regional actors in world politics.