

Affect and the Arab Spring - Report

Speaker: Dr Ty Solomon, Lecturer in International Relations, University of Glasgow

Discussant: Jan Daniel, Researcher, Institute of International Relations

Chair: Jakub Eberle, Researcher, Institute of International Relations

Ty Solomon's lecture, which was hosted at the Institute of International Relations on Tuesday, the 10th of November, surveyed the role of affect and collective emotions in the igniting and amplifying of the tumultuous events of the 2011 Arab Spring. By studying the Arab Spring through the prism of ontological security, Solomon has reached the conclusion that collective emotions played a significant role in uprisings such as the Egyptian Revolution. However, this perspective has been largely overlooked by academics, who were more concerned with examining the political-economic grievances which sparked the protests and the role of social media in spreading them. Solomon has consequently sought to fill this gap in the literature with a forthcoming research paper titled 'Ontological Security, Circulations of Affect and the Arab Spring.' A summary of the core ideas of this paper served as the basis for his forty-five minute long lecture.

By reinterpreting the IR literatures on ontological security and emotions from a perspective based on the work of Gilles Deleuze and articulating this in the context of the Arab Spring, Solomon has attempted to address oversights in both IR theory and the analyses of the Arab Spring. His research therefore marks a shift away from realist perspectives on the Arab Spring, which are focused primarily on physical security and actors, to ontological security, where the security of the 'self', identity, and context are of greater significance. Although the study of emotions, particularly state-level emotions, has already attracted interest from IR scholars, emotions on a micro-political level have not received the same attention. The analysis of feelings, moods, atmospheres, and trans-personal collective affects is therefore critically important in addressing how the protests spread and became a trans-national phenomenon. Solomon then concluded with the remark that collective affect and emotions are not simply just visible in revolutions, but are also underlying components in politics as whole and, as such, require much deeper attention from IR scholars.