

## Rewriting the History of Political Thought From the Margins

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Lehrbereich Theorie der Politik

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### Call for Papers

The history of political thought is usually narrated as a sequence of canonical authors reflecting on a limited set of perennial problems, such as justice, freedom, domination, tyranny, and the just regime. However, feminist and decolonial approaches have long contested this narrative. By tracing diverse lineages in the history of political thought, they seek to rectify problematic omissions while elucidating contemporary issues. In recent years, scholars working in the history of political thought have increasingly showed an interest in re-centering marginalized bodies of thought. This conference aims to set up a dialogue between these different approaches to shed light on the thematic, methodological, and political dimensions of rewriting the history of political thought. How can we place authors, traditions, and concepts center-stage that are typically relegated to the margins of the dominant historical narrative? Particular attention will be paid to marginalized concepts (slavery, foreignness, infidelity), non-Western and women political thinkers who have been excluded, and political events that have been dismissed as falling outside of the scope of political thought (for example the “woman question” or the Haitian revolution).

In this workshop, we wish to contribute to the current discussion by addressing case studies, methodological questions, and strategies that aim to diffuse Western, male-centered history of political thought. Covering the period from the late Middle Ages to the present, this conference follows three closely interwoven threads:

1. By diversifying lineages in the history of political theory, we can redefine **key concepts and themes**. By focusing on forgotten radical experiments, traditions of political thought and activism, and neglected authors, some concepts in the history of political thought (such as the state, sovereignty, authority) might lose their centrality, while others (such as freedom, citizenship, property rights) might have various conflicting and alternative meanings. Such a “history of political concepts from below” (Bogues and Laudani) starts from the use of concepts within political struggles, rather than their theorization in canonical texts. Furthermore, if we do start from canonical texts, we will likely find theoretical reflections on politics scattered both in treatises on metaphysics and ethics (e.g. Ibn Sina, Ibn Tufayl, Ibn-Rushd, John of Jandun, Elijah Del Medigo) as well as through the works with a more forthright political intention (e.g. Giles of Rome, Ptolemy of Lucca, Marsilius of Padua, Leonardo Bruni, Donato Giannotti, the treatise of the Monarchomachs, Henry Parker, Ibn Khaldun etc.). How can we relate their reflections on politics to those in other fields, such as ontology and metaphysics, and what does this teach us about the various theorizations of social and political relations? Finally, the very periodization of political thought is the object of critique: how is exclusion and marginalization affected by the much-criticized notion of modernity? How does de-centering hegemonic texts and events (e.g. Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, the French Revolution) and the re-centering of other texts or events (e.g. the

treaties in North America and the Haitian Revolution) alter our periodization and the key concepts associated with each era?

2. Rewriting the history of political thought brings up a number of **methodological issues**. Political thought is typically based on texts, while the transmission of texts is itself biased in favor of those political and theoretical groups that have been dominant. As a consequence, unorthodox positions as well as the position of marginalized authors such as women and non-Western thinkers have been lost, handed over to us by means of texts written by others, or transmitted orally. Furthermore, if we do have texts, these might not be widely available as they might not be translated or digitally accessible, and they might also be of another nature than the texts that dominate the canon – they might, for instance, be letters and diaries rather than lectures and monographs. How can we remedy these lacunas – what reading strategies can we develop to recuperate their thought? Moreover, what is the best way to write about authors and intellectual-political debates, especially when there is a dearth of textual sources? In the absence of texts written in their own voice, could we engage in fiction to conjure up the lost authors of the history of political thought – and to what extent would such a romanticized version be different from the historical constructions that are published as ‘genuine’ academic work?
3. To explore alternative histories of political thought raises **strategic questions** related to the institutions in which we pursue our research and teaching, as well as to contemporary politics. If we assume that the ontological and metaphysical assumptions underpinning these works are radically different from our own, how can we assess their relevancy for understanding contemporary politics? These questions also speak directly to challenges in teaching these texts. Rethinking the history of political thought has implications both for scholarship and education, and while our emphasis will be on the former we also welcome submissions that focus on the implications for teaching.

Confirmed speakers: Catarina Belo (The American University in Cairo), Sandrine Bergès (Bilkent University), Gurminder K. Bhambra (University of Sussex), Barrymore Bogue (Brown University), Julia Costa Lopes (University of Groningen), Marguerite Deslauriers (McGill University) and Sanjay Seth (Goldsmiths, University of London).

### **Format**

Speakers can choose between a) giving a 30-minute talk, followed by a 30-minute Q&A, or b) pre-circulating their papers, and presenting for 10 minutes followed by a 30-minute Q&A. Please indicate in your submission your preferred format. The conference will be concluded with a roundtable with all the speakers (and open to the audience) to discuss the status of the canon in political theory.

### **Timeline**

Submission deadline: October 17, 2022

Communication of results: November 1, 2022

Deadline for pre-circulated papers: May 15, 2023

### **Submission & Contact**

Please submit your abstract here:

<https://surveyheart.com/form/6307528a1940d466be509504>

For any questions regarding the call, please contact Liesbeth Schoonheim and Ieva Motuzaitė: [liesbeth.schoonheim@hu-berlin.de](mailto:liesbeth.schoonheim@hu-berlin.de), [motuzaii@hu-berlin.de](mailto:motuzaii@hu-berlin.de)