

10th Anniversary Post - Pop Culture @ E-IR: A Reflection

Written by Robert A. Saunders

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ROBERT A. SAUNDERS, DEC 21 2017

E-International Relations (E-IR) was founded 10 years ago. To celebrate E-IR's 10th anniversary we asked some of our blog curators to reflect on what blogging means to them, and to their discipline.

I discovered E-International Relations just over three years ago as I was wrapping up a sabbatical at the University of Leeds. Having come to the institution to complete my book on the popular geopolitics and the former Soviet Union, a colleague (who also happened to work for E-IR) suggested that I have a look at the site. To say the least, I was smitten. I started penning an essay on the satirical film *The Interview* within days (publishing it just after the movie's infamous 'non-premiere') and a few months later, I inaugurated the new blog channel on popular culture and International Relations with a post about why films, TV, comics, pop songs, memes and the other flotsam and jetsam we call 'popular culture' matters in the field of IR. While I have been with E-IR for less than one-third of its decade-long journey, I can comfortably state that I am invested in the project. Having published a chapter in an edited volume (which I regularly use in my teaching), a 5,000-word essay, and more than a dozen blog posts (in addition to recruiting and curating about the same amount) for my blog channel (as well as a few for other channels), E-IR has become a major aspect of my academic identity. Moreover, I feel like it is home (or at least a home).

Speaking from experience, popular culture scholarship is currently under siege within the discipline of IR. When I started at E-IR, scholars who worked in the popular culture-world politics continuum were viewed with condescending curiosity by the orthodox 'fathers' in the field; however, with the ascendancy of the reality-TV star Donald J. Trump to the position of 'leader of the free world' (sic/sick), the old guard of IR now see our ilk as an existential threat, steadily chopping away at the stanchions that hold the field aloft. As a researcher who has witnessed popular culture shift from the margins to the centre of what constitutes world affairs, I would humbly submit that we – PCWP scholars – have continued to 'beaver away' like Solzhenitsyn in exile, mostly oblivious to the great maelstrom that swirls around us. And that suits me fine. I sincerely hope that my blog channel at E-IR continues to study the small things, from the body to posters to children's cinema to food. We do not make Mearsheimerian grand claims, nor should we. Instead, we seek to enlighten our readers (and our critics) about the ways in which the mundane, the banal and the everyday inform how states, polities, corporations, NGOs and individuals negotiate geopolitics and its attendant forces.

About the author:

Dr. Robert A. Saunders is a Professor in the Department of History, Politics and Geography at Farmingdale State College-SUNY. He is the author of four books, including *Popular Geopolitics and Nation Branding in the Post-Soviet Realm* (Routledge, 2017). His research explores the changing nature of national, religious, and political identity in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

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