**Encountering the Uncanny: Anti-Establishment Esotericism and (Post)Colonial Entanglements in International Politics**

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Whether it’s ‘eco witchcraft’, meditation as a form of protest, spiritual leaders spreading Covid-19 conspiracy theories, or the global Right claiming Aryan heritage, the uncanny has a way of making its way into the political arena. Esotericism and the occult have long histories of anti-establishment thinking and socio-political praxis closely linked both to colonial expansion as well as to global processes of modernity and secularization (Hanegraaff 1996, King 1999). With notable exceptions (Birkvad 2020, Klein Schaarsberg, forthcoming), these impulses remain at the relative margin of current research agendas of International Studies.

This workshop explores how esotericism and the occult make themselves present in international politics by considering both its anti-establishment impetus and its ties to histories of colonialism and imperialism. Esoteric philosophies and contemplative practices have been and are mobilized to support multiple political projects, from 19th century anti-colonialism and contemporary climate change protest to orientalist ideas of a Global Right. Locating both ostensibly progressive and reactionary forms of esoteric resistance against ‘the establishment’ within philosophical and historical traditions insisting on claims to perennial wisdom offers up space to re-think the politics of esotericism. What role does spirituality play in how people make sense of and respond to global challenges such as climate change and terrorism? What kinds of perspectives on international politics does a focus on esotericism generate?

These questions cannot be answered without close attention to the historical entanglements between the imperially defined ‘East’ and ‘West’, ostensibly corresponding to the mystical and the political. Scholars have explored how what comes to be defined as ‘esoteric’ or ‘spiritual’ throughout history has far-reaching political consequences; under the guise of Enlightenment and imperial logics, labeling something as ‘mystical’ serves to delegitimize its public relevance. Others have highlighted how esoteric movements, despite their anti-establishment aesthetics, legitimize and reinforce problematic social and political structures. Scholars have only marginally started to explore how the intellectual genealogy of contemporary political concepts is marked by this interplay between esotericism and (international) power relations. How can we trace the empirical, theoretical, and political implications of these ‘East’/’West’ entanglements for the conceptualization of esotericism and politics in postcolonial IR scholarship? How can we begin to make sense of the ambivalences that are present in anti-establishment esotericism?

We invite papers to be submitted by participants who work on or are inspired by topics such as:

* The entanglements between esotericism and (post)colonial power relations
* The international politics of the uncanny: political and spiritual practices of shamanism, witchcraft, astrology etc.
* Questions of spirituality, esotericism and 'the irrational' within the secular academy and institutions of knowledge production
* Ethical potentials and pitfalls following from taking esotericism seriously within the study of international politics
* The historic and contemporary relationship between Romanticism, orientalism, and race
* Intellectual genealogies of esotericism, the occult and spirituality in global history (i.e., Aryanism, theosophy, mesmerism, etc.)
* Spiritual activism, or esotericism as an anti-establishment orientation and practice
* Spiritual ecology
* The contemporary politics of esotericism, neoliberalism, and capitalism
* The relationship between decolonial theory and esotericism
* Historic or contemporary perspectives on cosmologies and world-making practices of esoteric movements
* Contemporary expressions of the entanglement of the mystical and the political (i.e., capitalist spirituality, QAnon, mystical interpretations of white supremacy)
* ‘Conspirituality’, or the interplay between conspiracy theories and esotericism
* Contemporary political networks of the esoteric (i.e., connections between the Indian Hindu Right and Western esoteric Right-Wing movements and thinkers)