

Call for Papers, EWIS 2023, 12-14th July, Amsterdam

Postcolonial Hierarchies in World Politics: A Research Agenda

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Hierarchies, broadly understood as systems of stratification “through which actors are organized into vertical relations of super- and subordination” (Mattern & Zarakol, 2016: 624), are increasingly moving to the centre of inquiries in International Relations (IR). The recent surge of hierarchy-centred approaches “across the spectrum of theoretical and methodological commitments” marks a departure from anarchy-centred theorisations in IR towards more global perspectives on systemic power asymmetries (ibid.). In this context, postcolonial hierarchies and their violent reverberations in contemporary world politics have gradually moved to the forefront of scholarly attention. Building upon post- and decolonial approaches, scholars have thus begun to revisit the central categories, concepts, and premises of their disciplines.

As postcolonial perspectives increasingly gained momentum in the study of world politics, a growing body of critical literature emerged in domains such as IR Theory (Agathangelou & Ling, 2004; Bilgin, 2010; Sabaratnam, 2020); Security Studies (Barkawi & Laffey, 2006; Hönke & Müller, 2012); Peace and Conflict Studies (Barkawi, 2016; Sabaratnam, 2013); and International Law (Anghie, 2006; Chimni, 2013). Yet, our understanding of the dynamics of violence emanating from the enduring effects of colonial relationships of power remains limited. Taking up the invitation to “rethink the interplay of war and peace, conflict and cooperation”, this workshop advances a critical and cross-disciplinary engagement with the nature and role of the global stratifications of power engendered by the persistence of colonialism’s relational structures. We are interested in a wide range of contributions examining the continuities and ruptures of colonial power asymmetries within various sites of peace and conflict, as well as inquiries geared towards unearthing their embeddedness in international institutions, norms, practices, and modes of knowledge production. We welcome conceptual engagements with the notion of postcolonial hierarchies, empirical investigations of their functioning across diverse localities and institutional settings, as well as reflections on methodological opportunities and challenges in their study. The workshop aligns its multifarious engagements with the notion of postcolonial hierarchies with the recent calls to provincialise Eurocentric knowledge (Chakrabarty, 2000) and foreground the ‘worldliness of local practice’ (Hönke & Müller, 2012) in International Studies.

We invite contributions that engage with the following questions and themes:

- How can we conceptualise hierarchies and in particular postcolonial hierarchies in world politics?
- How do postcolonial hierarchies manifest in contemporary dynamics of conflict and violence?
- How do postcolonial hierarchies operate through concepts and practices of security governance, conflict management, and peacebuilding?
- How can transformative justice encounter postcolonial hierarchies while, at the same time, confronting power asymmetries within its own frameworks?
- How do postcolonial hierarchies govern our epistemologies and modes of knowledge production about war and peace? What opportunities and challenges does the study of postcolonial hierarchies pose to our methodologies?