

PEACE STUDIES AND (DE)COLONIALITY - PANEL PROPOSAL

Convenor: Dr. Claudia Brunner, Centre for Peace Research and Peace Education, Alps-Adriatic-University of Klagenfurt, member of AK Herrschaftskritische Friedens- und Konfliktforschung

Chair: Dr. Viktorija Ratković, Centre for Peace Research and Peace Education, Alps-Adriatic-University of Klagenfurt, member of AK Herrschaftskritische Friedens- und Konfliktforschung

PANEL ABSTRACT

Post- and decolonial theories and indigenous methodologies have only recently started to challenge the universalist, pacifist and critical claims of Peace Studies, which are still a largely Eurocentrist endeavour, even against their better intentions and universal claims. Inevitably embedded in the colonial condition of the Western/Universalist nature of scholarly knowledge production, research on peace and conflict faces serious problems with regard to theories, methodologies and academy-related practices. Scholars from the Global South and from the First Nations in the so-called Western world have sensitized us to reconsider the colonial heritage not only of political practices, but also of scholarly knowledge itself. The contributions of this panel will introduce theoretical concepts from post- and decolonial theories to the field of Peace Studies and fathom their potential for a vital reorientation of the latter.

The panelists will discuss theoretical concepts that seriously challenge, but also enrich conventional approaches in Peace Studies, such as the coloniality of knowledge and power, the geopolitics of knowledge or epistemic violence and epistemic disobedience. While we can link these and similar concepts to Eurocentrist critical traditions (marxist, feminist, postcolonial) in some respects, an open-minded acknowledgement of newer approaches from the Global South will necessarily point at contradictions and complicities of the latter as well. These are to be taken seriously, however, in order to move beyond the Eurocentrist impact of the field.

PANELISTS:

Claudia Brunner proposes to investigate epistemic violence and calls for a renaissance of wide notions of violence that take the coloniality of knowledge and power into account. In this context, she outlines ambivalences and shortcomings of the claim of non-violence that underlies Eurocentrist understandings of scholarly knowledge in general and of peace studies in particular.

Stefan Pimmer examines the notion of geopolitics of knowledge proposed by Walter Mignolo. He shows that Mignolo's epistemological perspective is based on a deterministic understanding of the link between place and knowledge production. In contrast, he proposes a non-deterministic conception which emphasizes the mediated character of knowledge.

Mechthild Exo discusses the wider consequences that a decolonial critique of liberal peace carries. There is a distinction between the critique of liberal peace as a project of war, colonialism and imperialism and a decolonial critique of liberal peace. Starting from these thoughts M. Exo highlights two decolonial research approaches: the Kaupapa Māori approach which is bound within the global indigenous movements and Jineology from the Kurdish Liberation Movement.

PAPER ABSTRACT 1: Dr. Claudia Brunner, Klagenfurt/Vienna
Epistemic Violence as a Challenge to the Claim of Non-Violence in Peace Studies

The overall aim of my work is to contribute to a future theory of epistemic violence - thereby enabling us to gain a better understanding of the various forms of direct, physical violence which are usually analysed within peace studies, IR, political theory and related fields. My perspective starts from transdisciplinary peace studies, is concerned with the sociology of knowledge, and informed by post- and de-colonial theory as well as by feminist critique and political theory.

I will first discuss the different ways in which scholars of peace studies understand and conceptualise epistemic violence - itself still a blurred concept. Secondly, I will confront these findings with post- and decolonial approaches to epistemic violence from outside peace studies, because they demonstrate a deeper understanding of the powerful nexus between geopolitics and epistemology. Based on an acknowledgement of the coloniality of knowledge and power that decolonial perspectives put to the forefront of their theorising, I will in a third step discuss the issue of scholarly and political non-violence that underlies much of the work in peace studies.

My argument finally points at the paradox between a call for a renaissance of wide notions of violence on the basis of taking the nexus of epistemology and coloniality into account, on the one hand, and the resulting difficulties of adhering to the non-violence claim that comes along with an explicit peace studies perspective. From a post- and decolonial view, I argue, we have to thoroughly reconceptualise both violence and non-violence as relational and processual. Moreover, we need to consider the role of the discipline itself as part and parcel of the coloniality of knowledge and power that lays the ground for the persistence of highly asymmetric power relations in the field of international relations and beyond.

PAPER ABSTRACT 2: Dr. Des. Mechthild Exo, Berlin/Greifswald
Decolonizing Research and the Eurocentric Fundaments of the Critique of Liberal Peace

The critical debates of liberal peace are grounded in a “paradox of liberalism” (Sabaratnam 2013): Western liberalism is criticized as oppressive, colonial and bellicose, but also implicitly relied on as the source of emancipation. This has not rejected in a rejection of liberal interventionism, but rather in demands for more cultural sensitivity, more local participation or an efficient control to save the idea of liberal peace. Relying on the work of Meera Sabaratnam I discuss how Eurocentrism is fundamental to many of the critical narratives. This intellectual Eurocentrism encompasses three dimensions: the culturalist, the historical and the epistemic.

As a decolonial strategy Sabaratnam suggests “a re-engagement with that which Eurocentric thinking suppresses or discounts; [...] that which locates or re-locates itself epistemically and methodologically at the boundaries of the colonial-modern” (ibid.). Building on this suggestion I present two alternative epistemologies for decolonizing (research on) world politics. First, the relational epistemology of the Kaupapa Māori research approach and other Indigenous Methodologies. Second, the new social science approach of the Kurdish Liberation Movement: Jineology. Jineology is an approach that is centered around women's studies. It is inextricably linked to a new societal order and intends to produce knowledge for the necessary transformations of a peace process in the Middle East.

PAPER ABSTRACT 3: Mag. Stefan Pimmer, Buenos Aires/Berlin/Vienna
Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Limits of Border Thinking

Since the end of the 1990s, decolonial studies have engaged in a radical critique on knowledge production in the modern/colonial world-system. In their debates, they draw attention to the colonial bias of knowledge in modern science. As their analyses have shown, this colonial bias manifests itself at least in two ways: the assertion of a supposed superiority of Western knowledge, and the racialization of the knowing subjects by means of an epistemic hierarchy established according to the “colour” of the skin or other phenotypical or cultural characteristics.

Against this colonial bias which tries to confer a universal value to knowledge produced in the western hemisphere, decolonial studies point at the link between place and knowledge production. This approach was elaborated systematically by Walter D. Mignolo, who contends the epistemic importance of places defined in geopolitical terms. With his concepts of locus of enunciation and geopolitics of knowledge, Mignolo intends to determine the geopolitical position of the knowing subjects and its epistemic consequences for knowledge production.

As I will show, however, his perspective defined as border thinking or epistemic disobedience conceptualizes a direct link between place, experiences and knowledge production. As a consequence, Mignolo tends to assume a deterministic relation between certain places and certain kinds of knowledge: according to him, for example, western knowledge in general is not able to recognize those phenomena related to the colonial matrix of power, an epistemic position that ends up confining knowledge to its place of production.

Against this deterministic understanding, I will emphasize that the link between place and knowledge is not a direct but rather a mediated one. This means that knowledge is not a simple expression of its context, and that its epistemic character cannot be derived directly from its place of origin. I will therefore argue that epistemic disobedience, as proposed by Mignolo, is not only possible for knowing subjects who have experienced colonial domination, but for all those who are willing to consider these experiences and join the endeavour of producing knowledge free of Eurocentric assumptions.