



Perspektiven auf globale Politik

AFK-EUPRA – 16: PEACE STUDIES AND (DE-)COLONIALITY

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AFK-EuPRA – Panel 16: Peace Studies and (De-)Coloniality

Chair: Viktorija Ratković (Alps-Adriatic University of Klagenfurt, Austria)

Presenters:

Claudia Brunner (University of Klagenfurt, Austria): 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



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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.

Mechthild Exo (Berlin, Germany): 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.

Stefan Pimmer (Buenos Aires, Argentina/Berlin, Germany/Vienna, Austria): Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Limits of Border Thinking

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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.

Sofia Ganter (Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany): Rethinking Concepts of Peace

Motivated by a structural blind spot of Peace Studies regarding the (manifoldness of) definitions of its central concept “peace”, I argue that this blind spot is especially manifested in the Eurocentric view on peace. My claim: Non-“Western” concepts of peace should be considered more in Peace Studies.

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Contemporary “Western” respectively European Peace Studies have several structural blind spots. As encouraged by the Call for Papers my presentation will focus on one of these blind spots: The Eurocentric disregard of non-“Western” concepts of peace.

Before coming to the arguments of my presentation, I want to raise some questions that inspire my research and that might lead to some discussions during the conference:

- What do Peace Studies understand by “peace”?
- Are concepts of peace (well) enough researched and discussed? How strong is the conceptual reflection in contemporary Peace Studies?
- (Why) is there a certain unwillingness to deal with conceptual issues? Do researchers consider theoretical-conceptual reflection outdated in times of an empirical boom in Peace Studies?
- How to deal with the prevalence of “Western” concepts of peace?
- How could non-“Western” concepts be regarded more in contemporary European (Eurocentric) Peace Studies? What could (critical) research(ers) do against this epistemic violence?

In my presentation I will argue that the work on our concepts should be “basic research” in social science, as conceptual work is its core: A different understanding of a term leads to a different object of investigation and e.g. to different policy implications. Concretely said, concepts of our core term “peace” are (not yet) well researched in European Peace Studies, especially those going beyond “Western” concepts. Considered that “Western” Peace Studies do research all over the world by applying mostly Eurocentric theories and concepts, I will argue that these neo-colonial forms of research are problematic: They reproduce epistemic violence by imposing our concepts without listening to the “other”. Therefore, the presentation is motivated by postcolonial perspectives and thus sheds some lights on non-“Western” concepts of peace, showing that there is more than the most fashionable narrow concept of peace, the latter defining peace as absence of war. Critical Peace Studies already deal with these conceptual issues, but a worldwide comparison of concepts of peace in Peace Studies is (yet) lacking. My presentation will contain thoughts on first steps toward this global comparison, enhancing the understanding of the manifoldness of peace(s).

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