

## CALL FOR PAPERS



Conference

# Decolonising Political Concepts

*Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> – Friday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2019*

*Hosted by the*

*Centre for Citizenship, Civil Society and Rule of Law ([CISRUL](#))*

*University of Aberdeen*

**Deadline for abstracts submission: 6<sup>th</sup> June 2019**

**Invited Key Speakers:** Julie Cupples (University of Edinburgh), Oscar Guardiola-Rivera (Birkbeck University), Salman Sayyid (University of Leeds)

Postcolonial and decolonial thinkers and activists have spent the last decades unravelling the intellectual, political and structural legacies of colonialism and ongoing coloniality in our contemporary world. Political concepts are part of these legacies. The way academics define and use them is generally mediated by traditions of political thought marked by and even framed by coloniality. However, and despite the increasing and far-reaching work of postcolonial and decolonial research, this aspect of political concepts is still too often silenced or ignored in some academic settings. As a Centre for Citizenship, Civil Society and Rule of Law and a PhD programme focused on political concepts, we feel the need to bring these debates to our research and thinking. We aim to engage not only with the Centre's core concepts but also with projects dealing with, but not exclusively, sovereignty, secularism or democracy. We particularly invite intersectional critiques and perspectives on political concepts and decolonial theories related to these.

Coloniality endures, we propose, in the privileging of certain forms of knowledge and the dismissing, ignoring, or silencing of others. Decolonising political concepts is precisely about recognising and embracing the plurality of forms and notions of knowledges and epistemic methods, which entails in the process deconstructing the illusion of objectivity and universality in Western conceptions. Without wanting to

## CALL FOR PAPERS

perpetuate boundaries, hierarchies, and generalisations, we use the term "Western" to foreground the history of coloniality in political concepts and practices.

The coloniality of knowledge present in Western political concepts goes hand in hand with a coloniality of power, according to which political actors and practices are classified based on Western universalised norms. To acknowledge the entanglement of power and knowledge allows us to see in how far epistemic practices reflect and inform power relations and techniques and vice versa. Furthermore, achieving power within colonial contexts seems to go necessarily through the imitation of Western models in all spheres of life; thus, it is important to ask not only which perspectives became excluded through Western hegemony, but also how these were shaped and appropriated by Western thought. What is at stake here is the dismantlement of systems of oppression and marginalisation embedded in political concepts and deployed both in academia and in political practice.

To decolonise political concepts means to disrupt Western understandings, knowledge and socio-political practices by unsettling embedded colonial relations. It also means that we cannot presuppose what is understood either by "political" or "political concepts". Decolonial thinking and struggles have been recognised to expand and transform what is political. Throughout this conference and the participation of the speakers, we intend to reveal, question and reflect on colonial assumptions and implications that may be embedded in the categories surrounding us.

We call for papers on the coloniality of political concepts, and on how ontological, epistemological and political closures and exclusions are reproduced through their use. Papers engaging more explicitly with assumed and reproduced political and epistemological hierarchies resulting from an uncritical engagement with Western political concepts are also welcome. Lastly, we seek to open up collective and collaborative reflections on how to expose, challenge and overcome the colonialities still permeating ideas and research by questioning the tools that political concepts are. We aim to engage with non-Western and indigenous political thought and experiences, inviting prospective speakers to reflect on alternative uses and on what decolonised political concepts might look like. We see such dialogues as necessary in order to find ways of living together that acknowledge and respect plurality and allow for genuinely "postcolonial" academic and political contexts.

### [Instructions for prospective conference speakers](#)

Prospective conference speakers are invited to email abstracts of around 300-500 words, together with a CV, to both [marie.wuth@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:marie.wuth@abdn.ac.uk) and [valentin.clave-mercier@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:valentin.clave-mercier@abdn.ac.uk) by 6<sup>th</sup> June 2019. Applicants will be notified by 19<sup>th</sup> June 2019.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

Speakers will have up to 20 minutes followed by discussion. We are not necessarily looking for polished research papers but for contributions and engaging responses to our questions that will help to open up new debates, or for work in progress addressing topics aligned with the conference theme.

For information about travel and about the city and region, see <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/maps/index.php>. Aberdeen is well-served for travel. There are regular direct flights to Aberdeen from most UK cities and from Paris and Amsterdam. There is also a very frequent train and bus service from England.

Questions should be directed to [marie.wuth@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:marie.wuth@abdn.ac.uk) and [valentin.clavemercier@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:valentin.clavemercier@abdn.ac.uk)

### Hosting of workshop

The conference is hosted by the Centre for Citizenship, Civil Society and Rule of Law ([CISRUL](#)), which is part-funded by a Horizon 2020 Marie Skłodowska-Curie COFUND grant.

CISRUL studies the application of political ideas globally. The Centre draws on expertise from seven disciplines to examine how political principles function within and beyond the contemporary West. Concepts such as ‘citizenship’, ‘civil society’, and the ‘rule of law’ are used as often by policy makers as by scholars. Core to CISRUL’s mission is informing academic and public debate on how they are used, and to what effect.

CISRUL brings together an extraordinary range of researchers, including PhD students, to study these and other political principles, including democracy, human rights and pluralism. We consider how they have been fostered historically, debated philosophically and in politics, fought over by social movements, codified in law, transmitted through education and the media, and lived out in everyday life.

Information about all our activities is available [on our website](#).



*This project has received funding from the European Union Horizon 2020 Research & Innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 754326.*