

CfP: Coloniality of the modern state

Anti-colonial nationalism arose as a response to colonial domination across the 19th and 20th century, denoting the demands of colonised populations for justice and a claim for self-determination through independent nation-states. For decades, this form of nationalism has served as both an ideological guide and an international political practice for liberation movements across the globe. Yet by following the same logic, these new nation-states did not necessarily dismantle the hierarchical structures of domination produced by colonial rule. Coloniality is central to this problem, as a concept concerned with how colonial power relations persist in contemporary institutions, knowledge systems, and governance practices.

At a moment when the liberal international order is collapsing, the colonial entanglements of the modern state become particularly visible. What can be learnt from decoloniality as plural horizons of liberation beyond the mainstream understanding of decolonization as a geopolitical process of nation- and state-building? Conversely, can the modern state, as a model historically entangled with Europe's colonial expansion, genuinely function as an instrument of decolonization, even in its "anti-colonial" articulations? To turn Audre Lorde's resonant proposition into a question: can the master's tools ever dismantle the master's house?

Scholars have examined these colonial continuities through the modern state. Some have focused on colonial practices of the modern state itself. Others have discussed the coloniality of borders, revealing how they reproduce colonial hierarchies that distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate forms of mobility along racialised lines. Scholars have also discussed forms of 'postcolonial colonialism', where post-colonial states reproduce colonial domination over minoritised communities. Finally, a growing body of scholarship approaches the post-colonial state not as the desired end point of anti-colonial struggles, but rather as an eventual synthesis of world-making projects to the colonial world order.

However, foundational anti-colonial perspectives fail to completely reject state centrality in different ways. Either they understand colonialism as an inter-state issue (Marxist historical-sociological perspectives), or they defend sovereign equality of postcolonial state inscribed in a West-Rest dichotomy (postcolonial perspectives), further obscuring colonial hierarchies embedded in current world orders. In these perspectives, borders are at times defended as a foundational basis of state formation and national belonging, reproducing neocolonial lines of race and deservingness. Certain strands within this literature attempt to address these limits by advocating the recognition of indigenous peoples, through plurinational propositions. Yet these approaches risk recolonising the state in indigenous terms without fundamentally critiquing state centralisation itself.

Many of these perspectives have been foundational to anti-colonial studies: taken as a starting point, this workshop aims to prompt further reflection on the place of the modern state within them. We invite contributions both empirically grounded and/or theoretical in nature, from different disciplinary backgrounds addressing these key issues. By doing so, we seek to create avenues for discussion and further collaboration, potentially leading to collective outputs such as a special issue.

Here are some of the many questions we raise across four non-exhaustive main themes:

1- The knowledge of, and produced by, the state.

- Foundational concepts that explain the modern state such as order, legitimacy, violence, unity, progress, representation, inclusion/exclusion and their relations with the coloniality of power.
- State-formation in Europe as a process of conquest and colonisation.
- The role of these concepts in the reproduction of the coloniality of power in postcolonial state-formation experiences.

2- Sovereignty-based international order and masking colonial hierarchies

- Sovereignty as an epistemic limit of decolonisation.
- The obscuring of colonial hierarchies through the principle of sovereign equality of modern states.

3- Postcolonial state formation as reproduction of coloniality internally

- Social homogenisation, cultural standardisation, political centralisation and elite control as colonial governance.
- Examples of ethnic, religious, gender- or class-based resistance movements against colonial modernity.

4- Borders and bordering entrenching order across neocolonial lines

- Mobility and coloniality of borders.
- Hierarchy producing classifications, citizenship sorting, territorial management, securitisation, within and through borders.

Workshop details

Dates: 12-13 November 2026

Place: Salle Kant. *Institut d'études européennes* (IEE)

Address: Avenue Franklin Roosevelt, 39, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

The workshop is going to be in-person only. There is no registration fee.

Limited funding may be available to support travel and accommodation costs for participants without institutional support. Lunch and dinner will be provided.

Submission

Please submit your abstract (between 500 and 700 words) to colonial.state@ulb.be and use the subject 'Coloniality of Modern State Workshop' by **15 May 2026**. We look forward to your contributions.

We will notify selected abstracts by **30 June 2026**.

Full papers are due by **1 October 2026** and will be circulated among participants in advance to allow sufficient time for reading and engaged discussion.

Organising Committee

Dr Jan Yasin SUNCA, Dr Diana VOLPE, Jorge SOLOZABAL ZAPATA

This workshop will be co-hosted by

Centre de Recherche et études en politique internationale (REPI) of ULB,

Centre d'étude de la vie politique (CEVIPOL) of ULB, and

Border Criminologies of the Centre for Criminology at the University of Oxford.

It will be hosted at the *Institut d'études européennes* (IEE)