

Call for Papers:
BISA Poststructural Politics Working Group Workshop:
Agency, Precarity, Precarious Life

We invite paper abstracts for a workshop to be held 19-21 October 2016 at Cardiff University. We welcome abstracts from academics and postgraduates in a variety of disciplines. The workshop will comprise of seven separately convened panels (see below) and methods café. This workshop will foster several extended collaborations, including a journal special issue.

Please apply directly to the panel conveners (see below) by 30 June with abstracts of no more than 200 words and a short biography/institutional affiliation. Papers will need to be submitted by 30 September. There are 5 bursaries of 100 pounds available for Postgraduate students, please indicate your interest when you submit your abstract.

This workshop is sponsored by the BISA Poststructural Politics and the Contemporary Research in International Political Theory Working Groups, Cardiff School of Law and Politics and the Georgia Institute of Technology School of International Affairs.

Workshop Abstract

This workshop is being held to stimulate discussion about political agency, understood as the production of and resistance to subjectification and control. In particular, we are interested in how agency articulates with precarity and precarious life. Precarity might be described as the dissolution of the worker as individual bearer of labour power with the rise of globalized networks of production. Precarity speaks to how today's worker is being depersonalized and refashioned as packets of time and intellect available for temporary purchase and optimal profit (Berardi, "Info-Labour and Precarisation"). Precarious life, on the other hand, describes the ethical potential arising from the social condition of shared vulnerability and mutual need. This potential is destroyed when vulnerabilities are conceived in terms of threats from which security must be sought. Security measures destroy social bonds of interdependence, creating instead uneven distributions of abandonment and safety, some exposed and some secured in garrisons of "we" who are not (yet made) "them" (Nayar 2014, 137). Furthermore, the drive to become invulnerable shapes practices that merely 'suture the social' through transient, conditional remedies, as in 'humanitarian' practices of piling debt relief packages atop crippling austerity measures (Berlant, "Austerity, Precarity, Awkwardness"; Butler, *Precarious Life*). As such, this workshop asks the following question: How might political agency be rearticulated in the context of precarity and precarious life?

Workshop Panels include the following (see below for full abstracts):

1. Precarious Life and Disposable People: Rethinking Ethical and Political Agency
Panel Convener: Louiza Odysseos (l.odysseos@sussex.ac.uk)
2. Performativity and Precarity
Panel Convener: Birgit Schippers (b.schippers@smucb.ac.uk)
3. Precarity, Race, Resistance
Panel Convener: Andreja Zevnik (Andreja.zevnik@manchester.ac.uk)
4. Regimes of Precarity, Practices of Refusal
Panel Convener: Philip Armstrong (armstrong.202@osu.edu)
5. Rethinking and rewriting precarity through (post)colonial sites and histories
Panel Conveners:
Tahseen Kazi (tahseen.kazi@inta.gatech.edu)
Elisa Wynne-Hughes (Wynne-HughesE@cardiff.ac.uk)

Panel Abstracts:

1. Precarious Life and Disposable People: Rethinking Ethical and Political Agency

Panel Convener: Louiza Odysseos (l.odysseos@sussex.ac.uk)

This panel is informed by rising concerns about contemporary forms of disposability. It seeks to examine the ethical and political agency of those considered and constructed as disposable in layered legal, social, political and economic discourses and practices that make possible their exclusion and dispossession. Contesting prevailing assumptions the 'political illiteracy' of 'disposable people', it invites theoretical, historical and empirical contributions that examine wide-ranging practices of coping, resistance, challenge and self-formation in multiple sites of global politics. It wishes to encourage thinking about the following and related questions: How does the thinking of 'precarious life' as ethical agency facilitate our consideration of the practices of 'disposable' people? How does precarious ethical agency enact resistance that shifts our assumptions about disposable people? How can we theorise disposability without precluding ethico-political agency?

2. Performativity and Precarity

Panel Convener: Birgit Schippers (b.schippers@smucb.ac.uk)

The concept of performativity has been deployed in the humanities and social science literatures to theorize practices aimed at destabilizing or disrupting identity politics.

While debates relating to performativity continue to inform scholarly work in IR and beyond, recent critical attention has turned to the notion of precarity, understood as a state of socially induced inequality. Thus, precarity articulates the unequal global distribution of vulnerability, dependency and violence and their circulation along racialized, gendered and other lines of social stratification (see e.g. Butler 2009, 2015).

This panel aims to consider the tensions, insights and promises generated by the pairing of precarity and performativity. Such a pairing invites particular attention to practices of political agency and collective politics; to formations of community that transcend the boundaries of identity politics; to modes of livability and ethics, broadly conceived; and to questions of ontology. Paper proposals that engage with and develop the following questions are particularly welcome:

- What are the conceptual challenges that emerge from reading precarity with, through and against the concept of performativity?
- What forms of agency does the coupling of performativity and precarity enable, and which, if any, forms of agency are foreclosed? What kinds of coalitional practices emerge from performative politics? Under what conditions, and in which contexts, do these practices push against conditions of precarity?
- In what relation does performativity stand to claims about precariousness, understood as the shared ontological condition of vulnerability and dispossession that is said to characterize sentient life?
- What kind of ethics emerges from the pairing of performativity and precarity? Can such an ethics generate new forms of livability or community?

3. Precarity, Race, Resistance

Panel Convener: Andreja Zevnik (Andreja.zevnik@manchester.ac.uk)

The panel invites contributions which broadly speaking explore the relationship between race and resistance, and the political agency of the 'precarious racial subject'. With the police killings of black Americans and the creation of BlackLivesMatter campaign/movement, race re-emerged as one of the central political issues. Over the past 3 years BLM movement overgrown the parameters of a resistance or a protest group and instead started highlighting the systematic and state-driven discriminatory practices that 'racial subjects' face daily.

This panel thus invites contributions which bring in the forefront, problematize, and discuss the political agency of race. In particular we are interested in contributions which aim to look at different ways of political participation, mobilizing forces, factors, political alternatives (imaginaries) and resistance practices which are particular and significant to the political participation of a 'precarious racial subject'. The above-presented example of BLM is just one instance highlighting the importance of race in (global) politics, it by no means limits the scope of panel contributions; on the contrary panel contributions are welcome to draw on any other current or historical example which help us

understand the relationship between race, agency and forms of political participation.

4. Regimes of Precarity, Practices of Refusal

Panel Convener: Philip Armstrong (armstrong.202@osu.edu)

In rethinking political agency in the contexts of precarity and precarious life, the panel addresses the specific regimes and (neo)-liberal states in which precarity and precarious life become articulated. The panel seeks to explore a political theorization of precarity that addresses not only the conditions of work, productivity, and social reproduction, or the conditions of subjugation and control; it thus seeks to open a renewed understanding of both the historical and contemporary conditions—indeed, the (neo)-liberal state formations—informing precarious existence as well as its possible refusal, subversion, or resistance.

5. Rethinking and rewriting precarity through (post)colonial sites and histories

Panel Conveners:

Tahseen Kazi (tahseen.kazi@inta.gatech.edu)

Elisa Wynne-Hughes (Wynne-HughesE@cardiff.ac.uk)

This panel is inspired by recent scholarship that helps us to rethink dominant understandings of key concepts and practices by paying attention to the way they have been shaped through (post)colonial sites and histories. For example, Venn (2009) underscores the role of colonial and postcolonial sites in the development of contemporary neoliberalism while Strakosch (2015) shows how colonialism informs neoliberal subjectivities (Strakosch 2015). Such projects have expanded the scope of spaces, agents and practices involved in the production of contemporary conditions of precarity and precarious life. In so doing, they help to decentre the power and agency from Europe and the West in shaping and resisting these conditions. This panel calls for papers that contribute to this agenda of rethinking and rewriting precarity through (post)colonial sites and histories.