

The challenge and promises of ‘silence’ in global politics

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Silence and silencing have been of concern to scholars of international relations for at least three decades. Early works parsed the ways in which silencing is constitutive of epistemic, structural and institutional domination, while the latest literature has discussed the productive and resistive functions of silence and focused on communicative silences. Particularly, scholars examine how these silences manifest, what they ‘do’ in different communicative contexts and how they relate to existing power relations. This panels brings together scholars at the cutting edge of these developments. On the one hand, panellists engage with the ways in which the elision of silence in the global digital sphere has fostered miscommunication and apathy, while silence as ‘patience’ may allow for better communication. On the other hand, panellists engage and with and theorise the silencing of atrocities and its productive functions, examining how governments and other actors keep their silence in relation to humanitarian catastrophes that they witness or perpetuate, and what factors enable this. Consequently, the papers brought together in this panel demonstrate the centrality of silence for understanding global politics and particularly its implication in, how it functions to constitute barriers to the implementation of the UN General Secretary’s agenda and its possible contribution to addressing challenges which necessitate effective communication and democratic participation.

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