

Global Politics and British Psychoanalytic Theory

Thursday 4 June 2026 15:00 (1h 30m)

This panel explores the unconscious foundations of global politics. It draws on the works of British psychoanalytic theorists, including Melanie Klein, Wilfred Bion, and John Bowlby, to examine how psychological processes shape political identities, collective anxieties, and relational dynamics. These processes occur not only within individual minds but also across states, organisations, and institutions, where they are a constitutive part of decision-making and broader political structures. The panel considers how British psychoanalysis provides conceptual tools to trace invisible forces that underpin the affective and relational substrata of power, conflict, and cooperation, paying useful attention to group dynamics and relational identity formation. This focus on the unseen psychological architectures of international life challenges conventional IR frameworks and shows how unconscious, relational, and emotional dynamics constrain and enable political action. The panel demonstrates that psychoanalytic perspectives offer novel insights into the emotional and relational foundations of global politics. It argues that British psychoanalytic theory encourages scholars to re-theorise international relations and asserts that understanding the unconscious proves essential for grasping both the possibilities and the limits of human and institutional behaviour. This underscores the value of integrating psychoanalytic thought into contemporary debates on global governance, security, and collective political life.

Track Classification: Emotions in Politics and International Relations Working Group