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The Closure of the International System

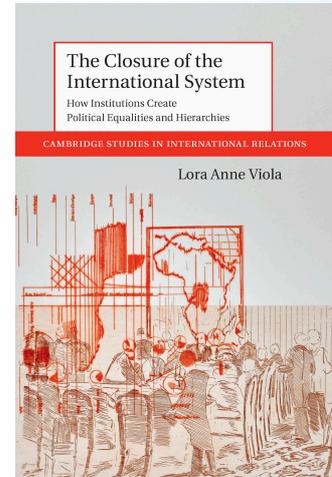
How Institutions Create Political Equalities and Hierarchies

Lora Anne Viola

Freie Universität Berlin

As global governance appears to become more inclusive and democratic, many scholars argue that international institutions act as motors of expansion and democratization. *The Closure of the International System* challenges this view, arguing that the history of the international system is a series of institutional closures, in which institutions such as diplomacy, international law, and international organizations make rules to legitimate the inclusion of some actors and the exclusion of others. While international institutions facilitate collective action and common goods, Viola's closure thesis demonstrates how these gains are achieved by limiting access to rights and resources, creating a stratified system of political equals and unequals. The coexistence of equality and hierarchy is a constitutive feature of the international system and its institutions. This tension is relevant today as multilateral institutions are challenged by disaffected citizens, non-Western powers, and established great powers discontent with the distribution of political rights and authority.

1. False promises of universalism: the interdependent logics of equality and inequality in the international system; 2. The closure thesis: social closure, club dynamics, and stratification in the international system; 3. 'The master institution': diplomacy, practices of closure, and the emergence of an international system in early modern Europe; 4. 'Dwarves and giants': international law, the monopolization of sovereign rights, and stratification in the international system; 5. International organizations: between sovereign equality and the institutionalization of inequality; 6. What remains of the promise of equality?; Index.



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'In this outstanding book, Lora Ann Viola shows that inclusion and exclusion are two faces of the same coin. Institutional processes that foster equality in world politics inevitably enshrine forms of inequality in parallel. This insightful argument makes for a particularly lucid account of the tragic and antagonistic nature of international history and society.'

Vincent Pouliot,
*James McGill Professor,
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