

## 2016 seminars

### **Wednesday 19 October: Brexit Roundtable**

What is the possible impact of Brexit upon the UK's relationship with the EU and the UK's place in the international system? Academics from the School of Law, Criminology and Government tackled these questions by looking at the impact of Brexit in their own areas of expertise.

- Professor Mary Farrell addressed the question 'Is the UK heading for a Hard Brexit?'
- Dr Lorenzo Cladi then looked at the possible impact of Brexit for European Security.
- Dr Patrick Holden discussed the impact of Brexit on the International Political Economy.
- Finally, Dr Piers Revell focused on Brexit's likely effects on the global environmental governance.

### **Wednesday 9 November: Power and Poverty in Africa-EU Relations - Assessing West Africa's Free Trade Deal (speaker: Mark Langan, University of Leicester)**

West African countries will soon implement an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union. The EPA will bring about 'reciprocal' free trade between the blocs, requiring substantial tariff liberalisation on the part of the West African signatories. In his talk, Dr Mark Langan examined the potential development impact of the EPA in terms of poverty reduction and livelihoods in the region. In particular, it underscores potential food security implications of tariff dismantling for local agricultural producers in sectors such as poultry and tomato agro-processing.

### **Wednesday 30 November: Post US-Presidential Elections Debate (speakers: Dr David Brockington and Dr Chris Emery, University of Plymouth)**

#### **Dr David Brockington's presentation: "How the Electoral College turned a 1.3 million vote win into a loss, and other musings"**

Even though the Democrats have won the popular vote in six of the last seven Presidential elections, they've only won the Presidency in Constitutional terms in four of those. Indeed, the result came down to around 60,000 votes in three states. The world was surprised, because polling data estimated Clinton as having a 3% nationally as well as a comfortable lead of over 4% in what turned out to be the three key states of Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin. However, the political science "fundamentals" models estimated about a 1.5% Clinton victory nationally, which is roughly in line with the final result. David's brief talk considered the role of the Electoral College, the potential of polling failure, as well as discussing the futility of trying to find broad, generalisable lessons from an election ultimately decided by 0.0005% of the electorate due to the artefact of the Electoral College.

#### **Dr Chris Emery's presentation: "The triumph of Trumpism: how the radical politics of cultural grievance won and what it means for the world"**

The first part of this talk argued that Trumpism represents a reconstitution of popular authoritarianism, and the politics of race and cultural grievance in America. Challenging the mythology of Trump's working class support, this section of the talk

presented a complex picture of how economic grievances translated into support for Trump. Geography, education, race, and gender are all identified as key factors in the 'Trump coalition'. The second part of the talk briefly discussed Trump's victory in the wider context of the global crisis in liberal order and asks 'What next for the world?'

**Wednesday 14 December: What's in a Frame? The Moral Framing of Conflict in the Mass Media (speaker: Nicola Langdon, PhD student, University of Plymouth)**

How do the media report on conflict and interventionism? How does the utilisation of particular linguistic tools shape our understanding of conflict events and foreign policy responses? This presentation examined the British media framing and foreign policy response to recent conflict events in Libya, Syria and Iraq. Proposed is the idea that cosmopolitan morality is used to discursively frame conflict and in so doing legitimises and naturalises particular policy reactions. Linguistic choices may therefore be instrumental in shaping opinion and making possible the pursuit of foreign policy interests.

**2017 seminars**

**Wednesday 8 February: Stronger than Strong. Perceptions and Misperceptions of Power (speaker: Jeff Bridoux, Aberystwyth University)**

Addressing the question of decline or resilience of US power in the contemporary international system, this paper attempted to generate a reflection on how knowledge on power is generated by US foreign policymakers. Questioning the dominance of neoliberal rationality and positivist epistemology in knowledge production, the paper argued that, in addition to existing analysis of the material foundations of power, it is essential to also understand how power is perceived by US decision-makers. Going beyond classical neorealist analyses of perceptions of power, and inspired by Gramsci, the paper investigated the ideational and epistemological roots of such perceptions of power and seeks to answer the following question: How is knowledge on power produced and how does it affect its perceptions and misperceptions in US foreign policy-making?

**Wednesday 15 February: Revisionist? Neo-imperialist? Anti-Western? Deconstructing Russia's policies in Ukraine and Syria (speaker: Dr Derek Averre, Reader in Russian Foreign and Security Policy, University of Birmingham)**

Russia's alleged breaches of international law following the Crimea annexation and apparent disregard for humanitarian considerations in its military support for the Assad regime have damaged Russia's relations with the West to the extent that, according to one commentator, we are going through 'not just a spell of bad weather but fundamental climate change'. Concerns have been expressed about a continuing 'spoiler' role for Russia in European security governance and a 'sphere of interest' extending from Russia's western neighbourhood to Europe's southern periphery. This paper offered a closer examination of recent developments and analyses the opportunities and constraints Moscow faces in its foreign policy.

**Wednesday 8 March: The History of Human Rights and the Sovereignty of Ideas (speaker: Robert Lamb, University of Exeter)**

The idea of human rights is key to contemporary politics and international relations, and yet there remains no scholarly consensus about its origins. In this paper, Robert argued that scholarly disagreement about the emergence of human rights can be explained through attention to problematic methodological commitments within historical narratives. He discussed two such narratives, explained where they go astray, and unpacked an alternative approach to thinking about the history of the idea of human rights.

**Wednesday 10 May: The Ages of History: Periodisation and 'Global IR' (speaker: Brieg Tomos Powel, Aberystwyth University)**

In recent years, several scholars have sought to 'globalise' the discipline of International Relations by moving it away from its supposedly Eurocentric foundations. This stems in part from a call by Acharya (2014: 650) for more extensive coverage of 'the ideas, institutions, intellectual perspectives, and practices of Western and non-Western societies alike', grounding the discipline in world rather than selective histories. Yet whilst such work has recounted at length examples of Eurocentricity in IR, proposals for a means to decentre its history are harder to discern. This paper therefore aimed to move the debate beyond criticism of the discipline's Eurocentricity in search for a new, decentred, and global means of understanding the history of international relations, based on periodisation rather than a 'benchmark' approach to this history.

**Tuesday 17 October - Failed States and the 'Big Man' Phenomenon: The Case of Zimbabwe (speaker: Marta Nowakowska)**

Marta Nowakowska is our visiting ERASMUS scholar. She is an anthropologist of culture with a specialist ethnologist perspective in the culture, politics, economics, history and security of southern African countries. Her research focuses on post-1994 South Africa where she has published on the topic of ethnicity and identity in the Zulu population, problems of ethnic and cultural identity in sub-Saharan Africa and issues of culture security and migration in the region.

**Wednesday 25 October - Brexit debate (speakers: Professor Mary Farrell, Dr Patrick Holden and Dr Lorenzo Cladi, University of Plymouth)**

The UK is due to depart the EU on 30 March 2019, however there remains uncertainty over the terms of Brexit. With negotiations between the European Union and the UK having recently entered a fourth round, academics from the Department of Politics and International Relations within the School of Law, Criminology and Government take the opportunity to reflect upon what Brexit entails in their own areas of expertise. Lorenzo shared his insights on how Brexit is likely to affect NATO. Mary provided an overview on the UK government's response to Brexit from the initiation of Article 50 to the state-of-play in the negotiations with the European Commission. Patrick delved into Brexit and the resurgence of power politics in Europe, with brief case studies of trade and Anglo-Irish relations.

**Wednesday 15 November - Britain as a Global Actor: in Search of a Post-Brexit Role (speaker: Professor Mike Smith, Warwick University)**

This paper analysed and assessed the prospects for 'Global Britain' in the post-Brexit environment, within a framework of role theory. The first part of the paper identified key elements of the 'Global Britain' discourse and placed them into the context of role theory, with particular attention to ideas of role conceptions, role

performance and role impact. The second part of the paper explored the implications of these ideas in four arenas of UK external action: trade, the 'special relationship' with the United States, the United Nations and the Commonwealth. The final part of the paper identified and evaluated key constraints on Britain's ability to perform the role of 'Global Britain' in the post-Brexit environment, in particular the vulnerability of the economy, continuing institutional constraints and the changing international opportunity structure.

**Wednesday 22 November - Reactive Rearmament: The Instability of a Post-Nuclear World (speaker: Dr David Blagden, University of Exeter)**

If a world multilaterally disarmed of its nuclear weapons was ever achieved, just how strategically stable would that world be? This paper begins from the premise that the scientific capability to reconstruct nuclear weapons can never be expunged. That being the case, an escalatory race towards nuclear reconstitution would always be possible during international crises between latently capable major powers. Crucially, moreover, unlike contemporary deterrence – which is stabilised by the survivability of the major powers' seaborne nuclear arsenals – the facilities of rearmament would not be survivable, creating acute first-strike incentives and thus crisis instability. As such, the argument that conventional military aggression would be more likely in a world free of nuclear weapons may indeed be commonplace, and a risk that disarmament advocates are willing to bear. But this paper's rationalist analysis demonstrates that nuclear aggression would also be more likely in a world that had dismantled its extant nuclear warheads, casting doubt on the desirability of the disarmament goal.