



## **Introduction:**

### **Critical Politics in Times of Anxiety**

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This issue of *Political Perspectives* emerges out of the 11<sup>th</sup> Aberystwyth-Lancaster Graduate Colloquium (ALGC), which was held at the University of Manchester on the 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> June 2013. Established by Jenny Edkins and Michael Dillon, the ALGC is an annual event designed to provide postgraduate students with an interest in critical approaches to international politics a space in which to share and engage with ongoing research projects. The conference deliberately avoids a key theme in order to promote a rich and diverse engagement with the range of theories and practices that define international politics today.

It is testament to the reputation that this conference has built that it was able to attract keynote addresses from Maja Zehfuss and Michael Dillon. The conference also featured a special workshop with Illan rua Wall, Vivienne Jabri and Brad Evans on the emerging trends and challenges facing critical inquiries into contemporary international politics. This event was hosted by *Political Horizons*, the University of Manchester's post-structural and critical thought research cluster. As well as offering an opportunity for postgraduate students to share and engage with cutting-edge research from leading figures within the field, the conference also afforded participants an occasion to discuss the challenges and pressures involved in becoming established in academia. A special session on 'career development' drew on the varied insights and experiences of Astrid Nordin, Véronique Pin-Fat, Helen Dexter and Japhy Wilson.

The diversity of the four papers that comprise this special issue is a reflection not only of the breadth and quality of interventions that this event has become synonymous with provoking, but also a demonstration of the values and principles that this conference embodies.

In the opening paper, Lejeune offers a reflection on the emergence of resilience as the onto-political imaginary of contemporary neoliberal discourses and technologies of governance. Drawing on and pushing beyond Michel Foucault's account of biopolitics, Lejeune gives a provocative and convincing account of resilience not as a means of adapting *to* change but rather as a means of *adapting change*. This change of emphasis is subtle yet crucial as it allows us to understand resilience as a generative principle

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of formation central to the constitution of discourses, practices and ways of life both at home and abroad. This analysis of the function of resilience in contemporary practices of governmentality provides a number of important insights into the violence of resilience on not only our imaginations but also the substance of our very being.

In the following paper, Riemann reflects on the increasingly prominent role played by private military contractors in contemporary warfare and specifically their perception and conceptualisation within society. Drawing on the work of Benedict Anderson, Riemann highlights the crucial role that war, violence and sacrifice play in the (re)production of imagined communities – most notably the nation. Adopting an etymological method to make visible the contestation and politics of the language through which the social world is rendered intelligible, Riemann argues that the private military contractor, in participating in violence that is not orientated around the formation of community, forsakes sacrificial remuneration in the name of more profane and egoistic recompense. This paper provides a number of convincing insights into the hierarchies of sacrifice in contemporary warfare, highlighting not only the limited attention given to the deaths of private contractors but also to the victims of their violence. Existing in a liminal – or what is referred to as a ‘dark’ – space of legality, Riemann argues that private military contractors function as quasi-sovereigns capable of *letting die* in host nations, in which all life is rendered potentially *bare*, with impunity. This analysis on the sacrificial politics of violence in contemporary warfare concludes with the provocative and timely question of whether the nation, given the function of symbolic violence and sacrifice in its constitution, is outsourcing its own demise.

In the penultimate paper, Leifert studies indices of democratic governance, which have become a standard tool for assessing the quality of democracy or regime transformations in countries around the world. Leifert draws on Freedom House's index of political rights and civil liberties, using Foucault's notion of governmentality, to interrogate ways in which power and knowledge interact in the construction and use of these democracy indices and what the implications are for international power relations. The paper argues that the construction of the democracy index as a respected source of knowledge on democracy directs states to conform to a norm of liberal democracy which it at the same time helps to create. Consequently, Leifert provides novel and important insights into how the democracy index can be considered a global technology that governs states without formally violating their sovereignty.

In the final paper, Rossi, following Derrida, explores the way organised crime is excluded from the political realm and how this exclusion reproduces statist claims to sovereignty through exceptional measures which outlaw the (organised) criminal. Rossi uses the case study of anti-mafia legislation instituted by the Italian state to explore the dichotomy between economics and politics. This is developed in order to interrogate what this tells us about the way the sovereign and the criminal are mutually and relationally constituted through the opposition between what is ideological and ascribed to the realm of politics and what is non-ideological and ascribed to the realm of economics. Thus, Rossi provides a valuable analysis of how the terrorist comes to be seen as political and ideological, whilst the organised criminal becomes non-ideological and apolitical, and therefore more dangerous than the terrorist.

It should be noted that this issue represents only a small cross-section of the quality and diversity of the research output on display at the ALGC. This issue would not have been possible without the efforts and commitment of the various conference organisers, participants, panellists and keynotes. The editors would also like to extend a particular thanks to the various anonymous reviewers who provided valuable insights and feedback into these papers. A special thanks must also go to Tomas Maltby for his guidance and support in bringing this issue together. A final thanks should go to the authors themselves who have provided such thought-provoking interventions.