



**The Futures of International Politics:
An Introduction**

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As part of a wider programme organised by *CIP Unsigned*, the *Futures of International Politics* conference was held at the University of Manchester on the 30th May, 2008. *CIP Unsigned* was initially established as means for graduate students to present their work to colleagues in an informal yet constructive environment. As well as hosting the *Futures* conference, *CIP Unsigned* have organised a series of student-led seminars on topics ranging from the work of Jacques Derrida to the scandal of the Cambridge Spies. The *Futures* conference, however, represents an attempt to broaden the scope and ambition of the group and to connect graduates at Manchester with colleagues elsewhere.

The conference sought to address some very general yet fundamental themes surrounding the study of international politics. Although not intentional, the theme managed to anticipate the 2009 *International Studies Association* annual conference in New York. Whilst not intending to pre-empt the ISA, we did choose a theme that did not seek to dictate a very narrow field of possibilities. Instead, we sought to provide and facilitate a conference that allowed for the unexpected and fostered a diversity of responses. The call for papers actively encouraged innovative and original proposals that addressed both theoretical and empirical issues, as well as reflections on the nature of the discipline itself. We also encouraged papers that sought to address what it might mean to even talk about the future of international politics. The responses we received certainly reflected the variety we had hoped for.

The papers presented at the *Futures* conference addressed a wide-range of topics, touching on unexpected areas of international politics in an interesting and provocative manner. A panel on the issue of subjectivity and representation, for example, included a paper drawing on innovative feminist methodologies as well as an attempt to rethink the agency-structure debate through a Lacanian framework. On other panels we had papers that addressed the changing norms of soldiering with relation to the growing role of the private sector, as well as papers on matters such as temporality and memory. We were also fortunate to have Prof. Jenny Edkins provide our keynote address, in which she sought to unpack some of the underlying assumptions implicit in the conference theme.

The papers in this volume of *Political Perspectives* are a selection of those presented at the *Futures* conference and, to a large extent, reflect the diversity of the topics and themes that were addressed. All of them in their own unique and eclectic manner touch upon the future of international politics, yet any similarities between them end there. Indeed, what is presented is perhaps a microcosm of the wider tensions within international politics about what the future might mean and what it might look like. They also represent our own complicity and responsibility for any shape the future might take. The importance of these debates, therefore, cannot be underestimated.

Patrick Pinkerton opens this volume with a paper that, on first glance, would appear to shun the overarching theme of the conference in favour of an essay on memory. Yet, through a sophisticated reading of the work of Jacques Derrida, Pinkerton challenges dominant conceptions of temporality by emphasising both our responsibility for the past, the inherent undecidability of memory and the openness of the future to come. In order to articulate his point, Pinkerton draws upon the Bloody Sunday Inquiry and its attempts to establish *the* "truth". Against attempts to either forget the past or to render the past fully knowable, Pinkerton insists that we recognise the inherent undecidability of the past and embrace an ethics of the absolute beginning. As he argues, 'memory must not be concretised, given an impossible presence in the present; nor sidelined and ignored, but revealed as inherently unstable, unfixable and undecidable' (p.21). By rethinking our relationship and responsibility to the memory, we might begin to break free from the cycles of violence that operate to keep us stuck in the past.

In contrast to Pinkerton's paper, Linda Åhäll focuses on the methodological debates of international politics. Her paper might be viewed as a manifesto outlining the importance of popular culture, representation and aesthetics in international politics and the need for a greater understanding of the roles they play. Åhäll begins by outlining recent feminist debates on the issue of representation and the agency of women, focusing on the examples of Lynndie England and Jessica Lynch. Drawing upon her wider research interests, she

outlines how popular representations of motherhood operate to preclude the possibility of women acting violently. The remainder of her paper provides a powerful argument in favour of breaking down disciplinary boundaries and making room for a critical analysis of visual representations. Drawing on the work of poststructuralists and cultural theorists, Åhäll argues that we must broaden our understanding of what counts as IR so that we might see how unconscious ideologies are perpetuated by visual representations and how these might be challenged and undone.

Christopher Zebrowski manages to engage the future in two distinct yet interrelated ways. Firstly, his work reflects a growing trend that challenges the orthodox ways we understand, practice and study security and, secondly, his analysis of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat zooms in on the futural dimensions of security practice. Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, Zebrowski explores how security no longer relies upon rendering the future fully knowable but, instead, focuses on the contingency of the modern, network society. Recognising the dynamic yet vulnerable nature of the network, Zebrowski argues that contemporary security discourses emphasise uncertainty, resilience and an ability to adapt to an ever-changing environment. As he states, 'security does not refer to the absence of danger but rather the ability of a society to quickly and efficiently reorganise to rebound from a potentially catastrophic strike' (p. 11). He also highlights how these new

security discourses of resilience produce and foster specific subjectivities that are adept at responding to and recovering from disasters.

The final paper in this volume is by Rasmus Nilsson and focuses on Russian perceptions of Belarus and Ukraine from 1990-1993. In contrast to the other papers, Nilsson's paper is far more historical in its orientation. Deploying a constructivist framework, he examines how underlying paradigms shaped relations between the states. Defining paradigm as a worldview rather than in a strictly Kuhnian sense, Nilsson articulates three versions, focusing on Power, Nation and Law. Rejecting the persuasiveness of Law, he suggests that Russian relations were underpinned by the paradigm of Power (the assumption that the sovereignty of the two smaller states is subsumed under the sovereignty of Russia) and the paradigm of Nation (the assumption that Russia represents a distinct, ahistorical state which incorporates elements of Belarus and Ukraine). In order to unpack this logic, Nilsson explores a variety of primary resources in relation to issues such as territory, governance and ideology.

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