

# Cosmopolitan Dimensions

*The Second Annual Student Conference*

*hosted by POLSIS*

**7th June 2012**



**Department of Political Science and International Studies  
and Sociology**

Programme

Timetable

Abstracts

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

# Welcome to the Second Annual Student Conference hosted by POLSIS

## 'Cosmopolitan Dimensions'

### The Conference Committee:

- **Ioana Cerasella Chis** – 1st year representative and Marketing Officer
- **Elio di Muccio** – 3rd year representative and Logistics Officer
- **Jon Robinson** – 3rd year representative and Committee Coordinator
- **Lindsay Murch** - Taught PG representative and Finance Officer
- **Marianthi Karakoulaki** - Taught PG representative and External Liaison Officer
- **Emma Foster** – Staff representative and Conference Coordinator

### Introduction

For more than a century, the University of Birmingham has continued to provide new outcomes and ways of engaging its students in demanding and nevertheless rewarding academic activities, undergraduate research being an essential component of higher education. Designed to continue the university's tradition of supporting its students' outstanding scholarly work as future successful professionals, **The School of Political Science and International Studies (POLSIS)** is pleased to announce the release of the **Second Annual Student Conference - "Cosmopolitan Dimensions"**.

The 7<sup>th</sup> of June 2012 will be dedicated to undergraduate and taught postgraduate students (from POLSIS, IDD and INLOGOV) interested in multi- and inter-disciplinary fields related to social sciences, the conference serving as a forum to promote and celebrate students' achievement and foster communication among them.

By disseminating original, normative and empirical research on topics which assess the dimensions of contemporary cosmopolitanism, students are given the means to build their confidence, expand their network, actively bring their own contribution to the study of their chosen topic, discuss and evaluate ideas in order to make a step closer to a higher level of personal and professional development in an academic environment.

**Moreover, you will have the pleasure of listening to engaging speeches and Q&As on relevant topics by our keynote speakers:**

### Keynote Speaker: [Ramita Navai – journalist \(Channel 4\)](#)

[Ramita](#) kindly accepted to be part of a Q&A session, so if you have any questions about her experiences, feel free to ask!

Ramita is currently a journalist at Channel Four, and a correspondent from more than 20 countries for 'Unreported World'. Her recent films include: *El Salvador: The Child Assassins*; *USA: Down and Out*; *Zimbabwe: Blood Diamonds*; *Afghanistan's Child Drug Addicts*; *Burundi: Boys Behind Bars*; *Breaking into Israel* and more. She worked for The Times (as a Tehran correspondent for the Bam Earthquake, the escalating nuclear crisis, presidential elections, political demonstrations and human rights abuses), The Sunday Times, The Independent, The Guardian and Marie Claire.

In September 2011, Ramita worked undercover in some of the most dangerous places in Syria, risking her life, to report the reality and atrocities which were being committed there. She experienced first-hand life as a fugitive in Syria when trapped in a safe house with three of the country's most wanted men. As the town of Madaya was besieged by the army, the security forces and the militia spent three days raiding houses in search of activists and people who had been seen at protests. The result of this experience can be seen in her film called *Undercover Syria*. You can follow Ramita on Twitter at [@Ramitanavai](#).

### Keynote Speakers: [Dr Emma Foster](#) and [Dr Peter Kerr](#)

[Emma's](#) main research interests are in poststructuralism, gender identities, and behaviours and sexualities in relation to environmental politics and sustainable development. She has published on sustainable development policy in Britain and her current research applies Michel Foucault's work on governmentality to environmental policy activity. Her last article was published in *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* - 'The Personal is Not Political: At Least in the UK's Top Politics and IR Departments', written together with Peter Kerr, Anthony Hopkins, Christopher Byrne and Linda Ahall.

[Peter's](#) research is focused on applying theories of social and political change to explain trends in British politics, providing a revisionist account of the postwar development of British politics. He is the co-editor of the *British Politics* journal and author of *Postwar British Politics: From Conflict to Consensus*; his current work analyses processes of party modernisation and changing patterns of democracy, citizenship and political participation in the UK.

## **Presentation format**

The conference is divided into three main panels, with each paper allocated a 10-15 minute-slot presentation with 10 minutes of discussion.

### **The presentations will be divided into three main panels:**

- Panel 1: Political Economy and Security
- Panel 2: Contemporary Britain
- Panel 3: Gender and Politics

## **Prizes**

- The best three speeches from across the panels will receive prizes of £100. This will be judged by an independent academic panel.
- The best two questions from the audience will receive prizes too!

## **“Question Time” debate with student political societies**

The audience will be able to get involved in direct discussions with representatives of student political societies for a 40-minute debate, an opportunity which should not be missed, especially as we have prizes for two of the best questions!

Our debaters are from a broad range of political spectra, including:

- Conservative Future
- Freedom Society
- Labour Students
- Liberal Democrats
- Student Broad Left

# Cosmopolitan Dimensions: The 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Student

## Conference - SCHEDULE

**9.15-9.45** Registration

**9.45-9.55** Opening words from Prof. Mark Webber, the Head of The School of Government and Society

**9.55-11.10** **First panel session** - Political Economy and Security

- Anthony Maher – *America: The Foundations of a Cultural Superpower*
- Andreea Anghel - *Twenty First Century Circularity of Change*
- Andrius Juozapaitis - *Financial Stability, Regulation and the role for Europe*
- Amanda Moorghen – *The securitization of HIV/AIDS: Its impact on norm setting through the provision of aid*

**11.10-11.20** Coffee

**11.20– 12.20** **Second panel session** - Contemporary Britain

- James Bowker - *Political structures through 3D Glasses – Tiered Pluralist-Elitism'*
- Jon Robinson – *Re-theorising Cameronism*
- Elio Di Muccio - *New Directions for Social Critique after the Technocratic Idea of Excellence and its effects on Higher Education*

**12.20-13.05** Q&A with Ramita Navai, chaired by Prof. Colin Thain, the Head of

**POLISIS**

**13.05-13.50** Lunch

**13.50-14.30** Question Time

**14.30-14.45** Coffee

**14.45-16.00** Third panel session - Gender and Politics

- Laura J. Riley - *“Women’s issues”*: acknowledging reality or reinforcing hierarchy
- Dobryana Daskalova – *The veil ban in Europe: A triumph of the far right*
- Marianthi Karakoulaki - *Women’s Rights in the USA: The Influence of the Abortion Debate*
- Dana Al-Kassab - *The rights of Muslim minorities in European countries*

**16.00-16.30** Peter Kerr and Emma Foster ‘Being an Academic’ and Awards

**16.30-17.30** Wine Reception

All conference literature including: photos, videos, the booklet and feedback will be

available on our Facebook Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/polsis.student.conference>

# Student Conference Abstracts

## First panel session: Political Economy and Security

### America: The Foundations of a Cultural Superpower

*Anthony Maher*

This paper uses a constructivist framework in order to examine America as a cultural superpower, exploring the dominance of an 'American identity' rather than state. In order to do this, the democratising foundations established by Wilson's XIV Point Plan are determined as a turning point; a transition from isolationism to an active creation of a post-imperial world order, with the 'American ideal' as the defining normative principle. This shall be assessed as an evolved form of democratic peace theory in its attempt to establish not merely democratic government in Europe, but an international propagation of the American way of life. This shall act as the historical framework for a contemporary empirical analysis of the reified liberal-democratic ideals in which the 'American identity' becomes a collective 'Western identity'.

The role of international institutions (particularly the World Bank and IMF) shall be used to examine the manner in which the liberalism's normative spread is 'encouraged' in developing nations (e.g. SAPs) and perpetuated in developed nations (eg. the *de facto* imposition of austerity programs). This shall be used to extrapolate the manner in which 'culturalisation' can be deemed to occur through normative neo-liberalism.

Finally, the role of international corporations shall be examined in order to present the idea that the importance of 'America' has evolved beyond the boundaries of state to become a central part of Western socio-political culture. Through transnational companies (Apple, Coca-Cola, etc), the dominance of the American ideal is at the centre of Western society, and a normative desire within non-Westernised states (of which Apple's position in China is ideally illustrative). This shall be used to conclude that notions of America's national decline in the face of China, India, etc are not reflective of the socio-political reality: that the American ideal is more powerful now than at any other point in history.

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## **Twenty First Century Circularity of Change**

*Andreea Anghel*

In his theory of justice, Michael Walzer states that power can only be acquired by those who possess the dominant good of the era. In contemporary society, where money is the current governing resource, those who understand the mechanisms of business and finance have formed an elite whose authority is based on their indispensability to the system. Progressively, these men have upgraded their area of expertise to such a complex level that governments are now dependent of their knowledge in order to maintain a grip on the economy. All this time, the masses are kept unaware of the phenomenon. Conveniently wrapped in terms like 'decrease' and 'recession', the global financial crisis of 2007/8 and the Euro crisis that followed still remain mysterious concepts to most people, who do not have the vaguest idea about what happens at the top of this new social hierarchy.

Although, recently, movements like 'Occupy Wall Street' have shown increased concern among citizens, their eagerness to raise awareness is highly unfocused. Very few people realise that our ambition for awareness does not entail a better degree of understanding. Given that the media floods its public with opinionated oversimplified information, the common man only lives under the impression of having clear views. Regardless of organisations like Anonymous and Wikileaks delivering the wish for transparency and revolution, the sources of manipulation will easily go undetected. Whomever we listen to, there is a risk we will engage in a misguided or illusory pursuit of happiness. Then why not take a step back and look at matters in perspective? Why not realize that, while we are all overthrowing each other, we are chasing after the same dominant good? We are in fact the products of our values and the change we are currently seeking is not radical enough to cancel this circularity.

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## **Financial Stability, Regulation and the role for Europe**

*Andrius Juozapaitis*

The paper I would like to present would be adjusted to the conference requirements but it would be based on Dissertation (CREES) on the Financial Stability, Regulation and the role for Europe.

The paper covers the implications of the 2008 financial crisis and the consecutive sovereign debt crisis in Europe to different theoretical models of global regulatory standardization and harmonization. I argue that the previously 'accepted' explanations do not stand to the

pressures posed by the post-crisis occurrences and that their empirical predictions were developed 'during the bubble' in a similar way, as most economic models were based on 'hyped' historical data. I focus this analysis on three core approaches: I) On the transnational level - focus on private practices, regimes and institutions (Tony Porter), II) On the international level - focus on interstate play, coercive power and dominance of largest market actors (Daniel Drezner), III) On the domestic level - the constraints faced by domestic regulatory agencies which are forced to push for international harmonization at certain circumstances (Andrew Singer).

As it is an interdisciplinary paper, I also turn to recent empirics, and assess whether we are seeing convergence or divergence, based on international responses to the crisis. I also analyse the implications of internal ruptures of interests within the European Union, and the effect of the emerging 'multi-speed Europe' on the European and global financial standard harmonization. All in all, I prefer straight-to-the-point analysis and a close link between theory and practice and I tend to try my best at making technical areas as interesting as possible.

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## **The securitization of HIV/AIDS: Its impact on norm setting through the provision of aid**

*Amanda Moorghen*

Abstract: HIV/AIDS discourse is, to borrow a phrase from Treichler an “epidemic of signification”<sup>1</sup>. Such discourses construct the social meaning of HIV/AIDS, and the way in which they do so has a profound impact on the approach taken by those who work in the area, from the level of grass-roots activists to government departments. These discourses have created a social/political landscape in which the ‘securitization’<sup>2</sup> of HIV/AIDS (the transformation of HIV/AIDS from a health issue to a security issue) is perpetuated (and in turn reinforces the discourses whence it came).

First, this paper examines these discourses, looking at the way in which they contribute to the ‘othering’<sup>3</sup> and ‘worlding’<sup>4</sup> of those who reside in third world countries, and arguing that the social meaning of HIV/AIDS thus constructed allows securitization to take place.

Second, this paper turns to securitization itself, and argues that it provides a justification for the use of aid to propagate the preferred norms and values of governments, (with a particular focus on the US ‘PEPFAR’ scheme, which Jones and Norton<sup>5</sup> argue was used to further an agenda of abstinence, rather than the effective limitation of the spread of HIV/AIDS).

Finally, this paper shows the way in which the securitization of HIV/AIDS can be used to reinforce the very discourses that allow its existence, as it lies at a point of intersection between discourses surrounding race and sexuality, thus constituting a powerful biopolitical tool.

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## **Second panel session: Contemporary Britain**

### **Political structures through 3D Glasses – Tiered Pluralist-Elitism**

*James Bowker*

When modelling British political structures, strict applications of either pluralist or elitist frameworks are fraught with problems. By contrast, Rhodes' Differentiated Polity Model and Marsh's Asymmetric Power Model provide fuller pictures of the landscape of power within British Politics; however, both suffer from short-comings when dealing with how deep ideational changes alter the political composition of Britain across time, such as the waning power of the old 'Etonian/Oxbridge' elite and the ideational penetration of 'meritocracy'. In light of this, this paper seeks to imagine a new way of conceptualising British Politics: Tiered Pluralist-Elitism. I argue that this approach wields greater explanatory power as it allows for the modelling of ideational shifts across time, evidence for which I provide in the form of two analyses: (i) an analysis of business and epistemic communities within liberal democratic political structures, drawing on the work of Lindblom (year needed); and (ii) an analysis of the role of social-Darwinist ideas within historic and contemporary discourses surrounding 'social mobility'. I conclude that Tiered Pluralist-Elitism is able to provide a more complete framework through which to approach the changing British state.

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### **Re-theorising Cameronism**

*Jon Robinson*

The existing literature on Cameronism, despite its disputes, seems to generally draw on some combination of a core set of tenets: the perception of Cameronism as an electoral strategy, the noting of Cameronism's occupation with deficit reduction, a debate over whether Cameronism is a brand of One-Nation or New Right conservatism, a focus on Cameronism's employment of modernisation discourses, and finally, analysis of the 'Big

Society' device. These are largely helpful and informative, but have some problems. This picture of Cameronism misconceptualises the relationship between structure and agency – overagentialising Cameronism – and misrepresents the pace and nature of political change.

This paper will review both the existing literature on Cameronism and some literature on these theoretical topics, before combining the two with empirical research to come to a new conception of Cameronism. It draws on the work of Hay (2006, 2010) and others to provide concepts with which to analyse Cameronism – borrowing from work on critical junctures, evolutionary change, structure and agency dialectics, and taking some ideas from institutional theory. Ultimately, Cameron is reconceptualised as a nodal point in the complex interaction between a set of discursive, historical and geographical institutions, which result in a reactionary form of anti-Keynesian, which defines itself more in terms of what it isn't than in terms of what it is.

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## **New Directions for Social Critique after the Technocratic Idea of Excellence and its effects on Higher Education**

*Elio di Muccio*

This paper is part of the fruit of a reflexive critical observation of my own experience as a student of Cultural Studies. I was affected by the events that led to its final moments at the University of Birmingham and thereof mobilised to write. I later expanded the scope of my investigation to the contemporary *idea of the University* in more general terms; a University marked by: curriculums streamlined to match career requirements in the Culture Industry and the Market; increasing focus on employability skills; increasing stress and pressure on students to gather work experience, ultimately regulating individuals' modes of life by selling them fabricated desires, career prospects, and lifetime aspirations. In this paper, I specifically investigate alternatives to the idea of excellence as the guiding value of Higher Education. Bill Readings described the contemporary University as an institution which transformed from one devoted to the cultivation of national culture into one obsessed with the "pursuit of excellence": the design and delivery of a technocratic control which orders the management and administration of the social production of knowledge in the University primarily in favour of the accumulation of capital. I begin by highlighting how the criteria of excellence hinder the development of Critical Theories whose object of study is a society that is increasingly homogenising difference. I then conduct an analysis of technology on campus to portray the transformation of the contemporary University. Subsequently, I seek a Derridean alternative to an Adornian conceptualisation of technology and its role in the development of a theoretical framework for a "University Without Condition" from the

influence of technocratic capitalism. I ultimately gesture towards the importance of advancing a new guiding value of the contemporary University, calling for the theoretical development of an interdisciplinarity modelled around Derrida's thought, in the attempt to envision a University more open to difference and the production of social critique.

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### **Third panel session: Gender and politics**

#### **"Women's issues": acknowledging reality or reinforcing hierarchy**

*Laura J. Riley*

The concept of "women's issues" is prevalent in the mainstream-media and politics today, the prominence of policy discussions relating to childcare, education and maternity-rights is often regarded as a victory for feminism. This paper examines avenues of grassroots female contributions to public discourse, from "Mumsnet" to "Slutwalk", and assesses whether such contemporary predominantly female groups enhance or inhibit the emancipation of women in the UK as compared to mixed groups. On a theoretical level it analyses whether "women's issues" are a reflection of the priorities of women in today's social world and a useful tool for politicising women, or whether implicit within the concept is the notion that women are primarily concerned with issues surrounding their traditionally assigned roles and that these are deemed comparatively unimportant. Also relevant is the extent to which areas not encompassed within "women's issues" are viewed as the concern of the female-population, and the role of the media and political-system in endorsing prevailing attitudes.

This paper finds that the concept of "women's issues" is destructive to the feminist cause; whilst targeting women specifically once served to politicise a gender it is now an out-dated tool, implicit in its current use is the concept that women are principally concerned with issues regarding the roles traditionally assigned to them by the patriarchal-capitalist system. It further argues that exclusively female groups contributing to public discourse often cater to a patriarchal view of women as defined by their sexuality and/or maternal instinct.

The paper concludes that the bourgeois-democratic system and the mainstream-media present "women's issues" as secondary to the concerns of men and imply that the latter are more politically aware – focused on "human issues". Such thinking relegates women to the position of "significant minority" and represents a barrier for female emancipation.

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## **The veil ban in Europe: A triumph of the far right**

*Dobryana Daskalova*

I propose a paper that examines the way far right ideas have infiltrated European mainstream politics and translated into concrete benchmark policies on the empirical basis of the 'veil ban' that has recently swept across Europe. The tone of this campaign corresponds to the common characteristic exhibited in far right's platforms across Europe - the notorious preoccupation with immigration and especially immigrants of non-European Muslim origin that has framed their presence as a threat. To that end, the behaviour of the centre right has been instrumental in legitimizing aspects of the far-right agenda. I follow the way the centre is engaging in the same discourse commonly used by the far right and explore the link between the far right's position on the veil issue and the subsequent government initiatives using the empirical cases of four countries: France, Belgium, Italy & the Netherlands. The practical reach of the law is actually quite limited, as estimates in the countries reveal that a very small number of women are wearing a full veil in reality. Discussing the meaning of the veil as a social construction, the conception and implementation of the ban are considered a political statement of a far right character conveying a negative perception of the Muslim presence in Europe, running the risk of legitimizing in the eyes of the public a theme that is in essence part of a broader discriminatory, Islamophobic discursive practice. The law in focus here is highly significant for European political dynamics as it touches on the soft issue of culture, identity and values and thus indicates that the concept of immigrants as a threat is expanding its content and legitimacy under far right's influence.

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## **Women's Rights in the USA: The Influence of the Abortion Debate**

*Marianthi Karakoulaki*

Abortions are considered as a woman's human right. However, in one of the most advanced countries, the USA, abortions were illegal in most States since 1973. The famous Supreme Court Decision, *Roe v. Wade* changed that. Nevertheless, the debate on abortions is still current and it has a serious impact on US politics. This year's presidential race and especially the Republican primary election delegates gave a lot of emphasis on the debate, specifically after the new Birth Control Mandate by the Obama administration that requires all health care plans provide coverage at no cost for all contraceptive methods.

This mandate gave the opportunity to the Conservative Christian Right to influence even more the presidential race by attacking not only the Obama administration but also anyone

who did not express a clear – pro - life - view on the debate. However, the main issue in the whole debate is that it undermines women’s human rights in the USA by not giving them the chance to defend their right to “decide independently in all matters related to reproduction” (Human Rights Watch). One example of that is that during the congressional hearing for the birth control mandate only male religious leaders were present.

This paper aims to introduce the audience to the abortion debate in the USA and its impact on US politics and women’s rights. First of all, it will examine the role the abortion debate has played on the 2012 presidential race with a special focus on the GOP Republican Primary elections. In addition, it will examine the way the conservative Christian Right has influenced the abortion discussion and the presidential race. Last but not least, the presentation will conclude that the debate on abortion rights during the presidential race has had a negative impact on women’s rights in the USA.

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## **The rights of Muslim minorities in European countries**

*Dana Al-Kassab*

The paper will address the question of the rights of Muslim minorities in European countries. The paper would touch upon minority rights under democracies and some of the related debates. It will also –inevitably- touch upon some of the debates around religion and the state. In other words, it will explore some of the controversies around civil rights versus religious rights/ freedom of religion. The specific case of the debate around Islamic Hijab in European countries would be used to illustrate the dilemmas and balances. The paper would attempt to address –far from answer- some of the following questions: What are the tensions –if any- between democratic systems and minority rights, in this case Muslim minority rights? Can / should religion be accommodated for in democratic systems? Is the Hijab ban in many European countries justified? Is it in line with principles of civil liberties and religious freedom? The paper would inevitably tackle the conceptions/misconceptions underlying the anti-Hijab discourse and attempt to shed a new light on the debate.

Note: I am fully aware that the scope of this abstract as it stands now is probably too broad for the time given for the presentation. I believe, however, that my scope would be narrowed down as I proceed in the research and more emphasis would probably be given to the specific issue of Hijab, gender and religious freedom in the actual presentation. But in general this is the domain I would like to be exploring in my presentation.



Thank you for attending!

This conference was supported by  
The School of Government and Society

For photos and videos of the conference, please visit our Facebook Page:  
<https://www.facebook.com/polsis.student.conference>

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