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Editorial: British political studies and the politics of global challenges

Under the astute stewardship of editorial teams based successively at Birmingham, Nottingham, Queen's, and Edinburgh universities, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations (BJPIR)* has established itself as a journal of international significance, at the forefront of major disciplinary debates. We are particularly grateful for the work of the Edinburgh team in especially challenging circumstances. Those of us lucky enough to witness the late John Peterson in action understand the size of the shoes that the team had to fill, and they did so very effectively.

Assuming the editorship of *BJPIR* is a great privilege and a significant responsibility. As the new editors, we aim to build on *BJPIR's* already impressive standing and further expand its international reach and reputation. To do this, our vision for the journal is premised upon two overriding concerns. First, we will extend *BJPIR's* long-held reputation – as a flagship journal of the UK's Political Studies Association (PSA) – for **driving forward the research agenda in British politics and political studies**. Specifically, to achieve this, our vision for *BJPIR* whilst it is at Leeds dovetails the strategic vision for the School of Politics and International Studies (POLIS) and is to **position *BJPIR* at the forefront of scholarly efforts to understand and address the politics of global challenges**, such as climate, health, violence, and geopolitics. Second, we will use our editorship **to help further much-needed structural change in the academy**. Working with the PSA, we will support the discipline-wide effort towards gender parity, and improve the journal's representation of underrepresented minority groups, scholars from the Global South, and early career researchers. These twin aims work in synergy: we are ambitious in our plans to expand the journal's scope so that *BJPIR* serves a wider community of scholars.

In keeping with the journal's distinctive history, *BJPIR* will continue to provide a forum for a diversity of approaches. Our vision is **empirically, theoretically, and methodologically pluralist**. We value and will continue to support work across the *full breadth* of the fields of international relations, comparative politics, public policy, political theory, political economy, and politics, as well as genuinely interdisciplinary research agendas. This is reflected in the range of expertise of the Leeds editorial team, located in POLIS, which represents one of the largest and most diverse political studies departments in the country. In this Editorial Statement, we elaborate on these mutually reinforcing areas in turn, before returning to consider our role in addressing academic structural inequalities.

British politics and political studies

The landscape of British politics looked rather different when *BJPIR* was first published at the end of the twentieth century. Despite the prominence of the European question, few observers regarded the UK's departure from the European Union as a serious possibility. While constitutional reform was firmly on the agenda, the possibility of the UK's disintegration was not in the mainstream of political debate. And, despite the burgeoning literature on globalisation, the global financial crisis was not yet on the horizon, nor was the rise of populism widely foreseen. Issues such as these give a sense of the scale of the challenges facing British politics and political studies, both over the past two decades and going forward. Indeed, these are challenges that *BJPIR* has already made a name for itself in confronting and the journal will continue to do so (for example, Wincott et al.'s 2017 introduction to the Brexit special issue; and Löffmann's forthcoming introduction to a special issue on populism).

Much then has changed in British politics, and in political studies in the United Kingdom, in the twenty-two years since *BJPIR* was first published, but the original mission statement of the journal remains as relevant as ever. The founding editors were clear from the outset that the journal was 'not intended to be *Political Studies 2*', and that they wanted instead to forge a distinctive identity as a forum to 'deepen and broaden our understanding of British politics' (BJPIR Editors, 1999: 1). This core objective

remains at the heart of the journal's mission, with recent special issues and sections of the journal examining topics of direct relevance not only to the UK but to the rest of the world, for example, Chinese foreign policy and the legacy of the financial crash. Looking forward, we believe that British politics can be open and confident in drawing upon the best of a variety of sub-disciplines. With its tradition of intellectual pluralism and increasing methodological innovation, British political studies is well placed to address the most pressing political questions the UK and the world will face this century. It is our hope and belief as editors that *BJPIR* can be at the forefront of efforts to understand and address the politics of these global challenges, and act as a forum for a diversity of approaches and voices in so doing.

The Politics of Global Challenges

While it is at Leeds, our vision is to **position *BJPIR* at the forefront of scholarly efforts to understand and address the politics of global challenges**, broadly understood. We believe that *BJPIR* offers a unique convening point to consider the role of Political Science and International Relations in scholarly efforts to understand and address global challenges. It is also positioned to assess to what degree British political studies offers a lens through which to explore these issues, for example because of the UK's geopolitical position or the legacy of colonialism. This is particularly the case where the UK has sought to position itself as a global leader – for example on climate change, cyber security, or international aid – or where the UK offers itself as a fascinating potential case study, for example in its pandemic response. Our editorship – and aim to foster a more global British journal – coincides with the UK's political efforts to promote an era of Global Britain. The journal will retain its distinctive identity as an internationally orientated British outlet, as we set out a vision to position *BJPIR* as addressing the politics of global challenges.

These challenges include, for example, the pressing issues facing the planet related to the climate emergency, environmental change, health, food, demographic pressures, energy, resources, (in)security, and geopolitics – and the complex interlinkages between them. Our focus is on the politics of these challenges, including the ways in which global inequalities shape how such challenges are experienced, mediated, and contested at a range of levels. This is not an exhaustive list and should not detract from the significance of other important issues. Nor is it to suggest that other work is unwelcome. Far from it. The journal will remain the destination of choice for scholarship on topics where it has already played an important role in disseminating leading research. Our intention, in the spirit of the founding editorial, is to further broaden as well as deepen the scope of the research agenda the journal supports and promotes, in line with the urgent politics of the contemporary context. Here, we outline four significant, illustrative global challenges that we would like to see addressed in the pages of *BJPIR*.

Climate politics

From a British perspective, the commitment to reach 'net zero' by 2050 poses numerous public policy questions and presents the UK an interesting case study in the domestic politics of climate change. Climate Change is also an arena in which the UK has attempted to position itself as a global leader. In the context of Brexit, the UK presidency of COP26 (alongside Italy) provides possibilities to perform its self-appointed role as 'Global Britain'. To be sure, finding agreement on climate change is a colossal challenge, requiring immense political will to overcome formidable obstacles that our discipline(s) are particularly well placed to understand, articulate, and overcome. Whilst climate science has advanced our understandings of its catastrophic implications, the failure to avert runaway global warming is a political one (Shue 2019:254). Although the climate emergency is arguably the most significant of

today's planetary challenges, there remains an enduring lack of political will to tackle it. Necessary transformations are derailed by weak global and national institutions and processes. In the absence of effective cooperation, normative theorists are crucial in making the moral case for collective action (Cripps 2013) and the nature of obligations to future generations (McKinnon 2012).

BJPIR has already published several important pieces on climate politics. To coincide with COP26 in the UK, our first 'Editors' Choice Collection' draws attention to seven of these articles. The collection is a first manifestation of our vision, pushing at the comfortable borders of the discipline(s), through novel and pluralist approaches, engaging both normative concerns (Shue 2019; McKinnon 2019; Schlosberg 2019; Falkner 2019; Di Chiro 2019) and quantitative methods (Arıkan and Günay; Crawley *et al* 2020). We released this collection as a call to political scientists to give the politics of the climate emergency urgent attention. Going forward, we particularly encourage scholarship from scholars who are under-represented in highly cited climate science research (see Reuters 2021), in part to help to eradicate 'blind spots' in relation to those populations most vulnerable to climate change (Schipper *et al* 2021; Tandon 2021).

The politics of health

It is, of course, presently impossible to speak of global challenges without giving considerable attention to the impact of COVID-19. The pandemic has laid bare the vulnerabilities of our hyper-connected world, causing incalculable human, social, and economic costs, and confirming what health scholars have long argued: this is an issue of 'high politics' (Elbe 2018; Harman 2012; Kickbusch, 2002). As with climate change, the pandemic has revealed the enduring weaknesses of key global institutions, the limits of political leadership, and seemingly insurmountable barriers to cooperation (Davies 2020). As with previous pandemics, COVID-19 has exposed entrenched relations of power, and the intersecting structural inequalities of capitalism, race, and gender that help to create health crises in the first place (Sparke and Williams 2021; Harman 2016; Wenham 2016). Like climate, the challenge of protecting and promoting health 'is an inherently political one' (Lee 2004: 11). Politics is key to building the capacities, resources, and resilience needed to address contemporary global health challenges. And yet, global health policy tends to be reactive, targeting exceptional cases of acute health emergency without the deeper commitments to health system strengthening and addressing the underlying determinants of health.

The pandemic and its legacies therefore pose clear and significant challenges for the disciplines of Political Science and International Relations. *BJPIR* has a track record of addressing the politics of health across its twenty-two-year history (for example, from Moran 2000; to Mattila *et al* 2020; and Hawkins and McCambridge 2021), although this is more limited than we would like. We are keen to publish more on the politics of health because, like climate, it poses fundamental disciplinary and real-world challenges (Davies *et al* 2014). Health research is also an arena that extends our gaze upwards (to the global and planetary, see Myers 2017) and downwards (to the individual, the body, and the microbial, see Elbe 2018). Health also necessitates more multidisciplinary perspectives, as an interdisciplinary field of study (McInnes *et al* 2019: 1), to tackle the challenges relating to antimicrobial resistance (AMR), mental health, and bioethics. As the new editors, we recognise the importance of publishing more work on health with a global focus, including perspectives from those regions and actors marginalised in current understandings and work from the global majority (Bhakuni and Abimbola 2021; Oti and Ncayiyana 2021).

Violence and security

Before COVID-19 overshadowed world politics, the politics and international relations of the past two decades had often been defined by the events of September 11th, 2001, and the fallout from those attacks. The War on Terror continues, two decades on, even as we pass ten years since the Arab Uprisings shook the Middle East and North Africa. Wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria remain seared into collective memory, not least following the tragic inevitability of Kabul's recent fall. That focus is, however, to downplay civil wars and human catastrophes in less familiar worlds – the Democratic Republic of Congo and Yemen, for example – which remain largely out of a distracted western gaze. Alongside IR's traditional and quintessential terrain, studying the causes and consequences of military conflict, genocide has reignited the urgency of debates on the Responsibility to Protect, recently for example in Myanmar. War, conflict, and ethnic cleansing present real, visceral human harms that we are keen for the journal to continue to address and seek to rectify. Foreign, security, and counterterrorism policies remain at the heart of our vision of International Relations because defence and military interventions remain central to world politics.

To this, we add a vital rejoinder: the world's militarism, as much as its militaries, presents a global challenge to be confronted. Drawing on Peace Studies, the Welsh School of Security Studies, and theories of structural violence, we note that security extends beyond the visceral to encompass other forms of suffering – prejudice, marginalisation, hopelessness. These too are 'bodily' and lived. They are, however, perhaps less 'exceptional' than militarised conflicts. The recent turn to everyday IR and everyday security pays testament to the (important) banality of security and security politics (Nyman 2021). From widespread domestic violence and racial prejudice – from #metoo to #BLM – to the structuring effects of contemporary logics of counterterrorism, we recognise that violence and security are complex and multi-layered. We are normatively motivated to welcome submissions across the broad range of contemporary violence and responses to it, from war to the insidious capillaries of power that shape all of life's possibilities and potentialities.

Geopolitics and global re-ordering

Now outside the European Union, Britain is looking to establish a new internationalist identity by reinvigorating old alliances as well as through its membership of key international bodies such as the G7 and UN Security Council. On the back of the UK's Integrated Review, Global Britain's first foray as part of the Indo-Pacific Tilt has been to sideline France, in favour of old Anglosphere allies. Even as scholars and political elites work out what AUKUS represents – military coalition, technology sharing arrangement, or both – it is clear that adding Australia to the fold of the Special Relationship extends Pacific force projection capabilities. Efforts to maintain freedom of the seas and uphold a maritime capitalist liberal international order certainly appear bold and are evidence of a temporal horizon that extends beyond the mid twenty-first century, as the UK prepares for potential hegemonic transition in the context of an increasingly multipolar international system. Alliterative metaphors abound when discussing the rise of China – competitive cooperation, containment, confrontation. As key states in the Asia-Pacific weigh up the durability of strategic ambiguity, the UK is positioning itself as an active player in efforts to shape world order.

Alongside important theoretical and empirical questions of global re-ordering, scholars have also raised crucial questions about the way international relations is studied and pointed to the need for greater appreciation of IR as a global discipline (Thakur and Smith 2021). Britain's 'new' role has long and problematic roots that entangle with our research and teaching. Over the past decade there has been mounting criticism of Western hegemony and the marginalisation of non-Western theory within the discipline (Acharya and Buzan 2017; Vitalis 2016). We recognise the need to reflect on previous British foreign policy and its imbrications with our disciplines, as scholars increasingly reckon with colonial academic legacies amidst an imperial present. *BJPIR* has done important work in bringing in

global perspectives on political studies and international relations, notably for example with the 2021 Special Issue on Chinese foreign policy, which includes important contributions from leading Chinese scholars (for example, Zha and Gong 2021). The late John Peterson ‘not only thought that the time was right to have an assessment of this type’ but was also ‘keen to ensure that this was not just an analysis of China from the outside either, and wanted to see a real partnership that included Chinese voices and perceptions. And in keeping with his commitment to mentoring and nurturing future generations of scholars, it was to be a collection that would include scholars at rather different stages of their careers’ (Breslin and Pan, 2021: 197). We seek to continue this legacy, encouraging scholarship examining the multi-polarity of global reordering, including work on rising powers (China, India, Brazil, South Africa) and regional power blocs.

Redressing structural inequality in the academy

A focus on the politics of global challenges helps us to take seriously the call by Schipper *et al* (2021) for journal editors to confront the significant inequities of the academy and broader efforts by PSA and others to decolonise Politics and International Relations (for example, Begum and Saini 2019; Shilliam 2021). In our hyper-connected world, our fates are intertwined and global perspectives on contemporary challenges are vital. We will therefore seek to diversify the journal’s Editorial Board and reviewer pool. We will also ensure gender balance in publisher article promotion, extending targeting beyond the UK and US, with a particular focus on the Global South. And we will make use of opportunities for open access special issues to draw attention to key articles from underrepresented authors. We will ask authors to reflect on their citation practices with equality, diversity, and inclusion in mind, given widespread citation inequities (Maliniak 2013). Crucially, we will encourage submissions from Global South authors and authors from under-represented backgrounds, as well as encouraging work challenging western-centric knowledge and approaches. To realise these aims we will draw on the editorial team’s extensive global networks to extend the scope of the advisory board and promote active links with Global South and Asian scholars through guest editorship, where possible. We will develop special issues on topics relating to global challenges that attract greater diversity, and work with the PSA to run targeted support workshops (such as with the Early Career Network) and explore approaches which proactively mitigate possible unconscious bias and other obstacles to diversity.

The Political Studies Association has made equality and diversity a strategic priority. Chris Hanretty’s (2021) report made clear the considerable work still required, even where progress has been made. In particular, the improvement regarding the gender balance in submissions and publications in recent years has been undermined by the pandemic. The effects of lockdown fell disproportionately on women, parents, and those with caring responsibilities, which is reflected in a downturn in submissions from these groups across a range of journals, including *BJPIR*. There is much work to do, and we are only one small part of a broader effort. However, we see these objectives not only as right in and of themselves, but as essential to our plans to widen the reach and impact of *BJPIR*. As Schipper *et al* (2021) argue, ‘we must defeat the inequity in academia in order to produce more usable and appropriate knowledge’.

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