



**A British International Studies Association
Postgraduate Network Briefing Paper**

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KINGSTON UNIVERSITY, LONDON, 2020



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Executive Summary

Disparities of power often exist between PhD students & Early Career Researchers and more senior academics and the actors they study. This holds especially true for international studies, where access to information and subjects is often constrained by state actors able to envelop themselves in numerous, potentially legitimate, restrictions. This brief is designed to help PhD students in the realm of international studies identify, comprehend, and develop strategies for dealing with, such disparities. It evolved from a British International Studies Association Postgraduate Network workshop held at Kingston University, London, on November 1st, 2018. This brief reports on the workshop's key themes and provides intellectual framing and practical advice for PhD students thinking about how to network and develop and maintain professional relationships. It broadly adopts the workshop's structure, with four sections focused on locating, understanding, navigating and, speaking truth to power.

Locating Power:

Discussions of power and power relations in politics and society are ubiquitous. PhD students are subject to, and can impact on, such power relations. Institutionally this can include their relationship with their supervisor and those they teach with, while externally they may study institutional bodies with significant influence and prestige. One way PhD students can leverage their own power is via networking, whether with fellow academics or those working for a state or in the private or third sectors. Whilst networking and formulating their research plans, PhD students need to understand their own power and take research ethics seriously.

Understanding Power:

Definitions of power within international studies can vary from the elegantly simplistic to the all encapsulating. They can include theories and taxonomies designed to capture different types and/or aspects of power. As demonstrated by Antonio Cerella at the workshop, when attempting to gain a full understanding of power as a concept, one can draw important lessons from events stretching at least as far back as the Roman Republic. While more modern theorists such as Max Weber and Michel Foucault have added to an intellectual cannon containing insights from the likes of Thomas Hobbes and St. Augustine of Hippo.

Navigating Power:

While it may be uncomfortable, PhD students can benefit from networking within and beyond the academy. Networks themselves are dynamic and operate both vertically and horizontally, meaning PhD students should think carefully about how best to locate themselves. Engaging with those at a similar career stage may be as useful (and perhaps more enjoyable!) in the short and long term as trying to network with those at a more advanced career stage.

Speaking Truth to Power:

As discussed at the workshop, the work of Professor Ruth Blakeley of Sheffield University demonstrates academics have the capacity to help hold states to account. Via her work with The Rendition Project, Blakeley has helped expose detainee abuse and torture carried out by the CIA and its partners following 9/11. Indeed, her research has fed into the work of a UK All Party Parliamentary Group and judicial proceedings and led to her giving evidence to a UK parliamentary inquiry. Blakeley attributes the impact of her research to a continual focus on research ethics, significant engagement with non-academic partners and an awareness of the power she holds as an academic. Drawing from Blakeley's experience, this section provides important advice for PhD students thinking about how best to develop their career and engage, and potentially challenge, powerful state bodies.

The PhD & the Powerful: A British International Studies Association Postgraduate Network Briefing Paper

Disparities of power often exist between PhD students & Early Career Researchers¹ and more senior academics and the actors they focus on. This holds especially true for international studies, where access to information and subjects is often constrained by state actors able to envelop themselves in numerous, potentially legitimate, restrictions. This brief is designed to help PhD students in the realm of international studies identify, comprehend, and develop strategies for dealing with, such disparities. It has evolved from a British International Studies Association Postgraduate Network workshop held at Kingston University, London, on November 1st, 2018.² Drawing from experienced academics, and PhD students themselves, this workshop explored such disparities. In short, the workshop's objective was to help PhD students develop an increased awareness of the problems, opportunities and responsibilities arising from unequal power relations. This brief reports on the workshop's key themes and provides intellectual framing, and practical advice, for PhD students thinking about how to develop and maintain professional relationships. It broadly adopts the workshop's structure, with four sections focused on locating, understanding,

navigating and, speaking truth to, power.

In the first section, different ways to think about one's network are introduced. These are designed to help people consider research related relationships, and their capacity to influence a research project. Should you find this section, and the ways of thinking it encourages, useful, the session material is reproduced in The Appendix. The second section is dominated by the thinking of Antonio Cerella, Senior Lecturer in Political Theory and International Studies at Kingston University and then Convenor of the BISA Working Group 'Contemporary Research on International Political Theory', who, in the workshop's second session, provided a genealogy of the term power in a talk titled '*The Subject of Power*'. Broadly speaking, this talk critiqued simplistic contemporary understandings of power, as well as touching on how more nuanced understandings may be useful for interpreting academic power structures. Next, the brief turns to some practical advice that may help PhD students with networking related anxiety, whether arising from engagements with academic colleagues or those beyond the academy. Rather than a singular toolkit that should be drawn from in every instance, the section offers

¹ PhD students and Early Career Researchers often face very similar issues in terms of power disparities. For brevity, the remainder of this brief will adopt the term 'PhD students' as shorthand that also incorporates Early Career Researchers. It is, however, hoped that the material and advice it contains will be as useful

to many Early Career Researchers as it is to PhD students.

² This workshop was funded by competitively awarded funding from the Postgraduate Network of the British International Studies Association.

advice that may help one navigate relationships at different times and places. This section is heavily influenced by the experience of Camilla Molyneux, a Researcher for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Drones, who co-presented the third session. It also draws from the discussions and anecdotes from workshop participants and a subsequent April 2019 session at Portsmouth University. The brief closes by drawing from the experience of the workshop's keynote speaker: Professor Ruth Blakeley of Sheffield University and The Rendition Project. In an illuminating keynote, Blakeley drew on personal anecdotes to discuss how to (and how not to) network and, as importantly, use networking to challenge powerful actors.

This brief can be read in several ways. Most obviously, it could be read chronologically, with sections (hopefully) building on each other and insights cutting across them. However, sections can also be read strategically. If, for instance, one was particularly interested in understanding one's own contacts and how they relate to one another, the first section may be of interest. However, if you seek networking advice, perhaps the third and fourth sections will be of most use. Finally, if you are interested in theoretical understandings of power, then the second section may be your first port of call. Yet, however you choose to engage with this brief, it is hoped it provides a useful tool.

There are valid critiques of the over-use of terms such as networking. Many of the soundest relate to so-called 'bullshit jobs' that have no

constructive value and add little, if anything, to the human experience nor contribute to vital tasks such as tackling climate change and pandemics, preventing human rights abuses or alleviating poverty.³ However, PhD students (like all academics) do, and should, engage with a broad-range of actors. Thus developing (for want of less loaded terms) 'networks' of 'contacts'. In this vein, Richard Aldrich and Daniela Richterova have identified a growth in so-called "ambient accountability" in the arena of national security. This form of accountability, they argue, 'denotes a wider landscape in which connections between many different elements', such as academics, legal practitioners, non-governmental organizations, judges, 'European institutions and the United Nations', have been 'crucial in encouraging greater transparency' and 'helped' foster 'a cultural change in which the secret state feels increasingly obliged to explain itself'.⁴ Indeed, Blakeley's testimony arguably provides evidence of the existence of an ambient network that has sought accountability for rendition. As such, while certainly accepting terms like networking can become as meaningless as other examples of management speak such as 'helicopter view', 'cascading' and 'blue-sky thinking', this brief attempts to provide practical insights and advice from academics and practitioners who have already faced the challenge of developing contacts. Particularly in the second section, it provides intellectual frames that may also help PhD students conceptualise their place within broader power structures.

³ Graeber, D. (2018) *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*. London: Penguin.

According to David Graeber, bullshit jobs are those that contribute little (sometimes nothing) to the human experience, and in some cases actually detract from it by causing problems that did not exist, or divert precious resources that

could have otherwise been put towards solving problems or increasing human happiness.

⁴ Aldrich, R.; Richterova, D. (2018) Ambient Accountability: Intelligence Services in Europe and the Decline of State Secrecy. In *West European Politics*. Vol. 41. No. 4. pp.1003-1024. 1005.

Locating Power

Discussions and depictions of power are ubiquitous. In recent years there have been, among other things, a hit TV show named *Power*, a hit song that both poses and answers the question 'who got the power?' (answer: Little Mix), a best-selling novel named *The Power* and an edition of the philosophy magazine *NewPhilosopher* devoted to exploring the metaphysics of power. If anything, discussions of power in the realm of politics are even more prevalent. Discussing the link between electoral politics and power after his elevation to UK Labour Party leader in 1994, for instance, Tony Blair stated '[p]ower without principle is barren, but principle without power is futile.' Blair further promised, accurately as it turned out, to 'lead' his party as the 'party of government'.⁵ More starkly, US President Donald Trump has stated that '[r]eal power is-I don't even want to say it-fear'.⁶ Writing about a dystopian future in his classic novel *1984* (which, depending on your point of view, we may or may not be living through a version of), George Orwell stated '[p]ower is not a means, it is an end [...]. The object of power is power', whilst, highlighting a link between power and knowledge, Michel Foucault posited that '[t]here is no power relation without the correlative constitutions of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations.'⁷

PhD students are subject to, and can impact on, such power relations. Most obviously, there is (at least in an

institutional sense or when feedback is required) the relationship between a postgraduate researcher and their supervisors. Moreover, many postgraduate students teach within their departments, meaning they have power over those they teach, but must also navigate a second relationship with their supervisors as colleagues and slot into a broader teaching team and adhere to the institutional (power) structures governing teaching in their department, faculty, school and institution. Beyond this, many postgraduate researchers will be studying institutional bodies with significant societal and, in some cases, international influence and prestige, with aims that have little relation to the goal of facilitating the creation of academic knowledge or furthering the standing of any particular academic. More to the point, while PhD students may feel they are at the bottom of the research ladder and subject to the institutional and individual whims of others, it is vital (as with all researchers) for PhD students to understand their own power and take research ethics seriously. Put simply, PhD students must be mindful of their own power and yield it responsibly.

With this in mind, can understanding gained by academics experienced in the study of power be of use to those beginning their career? Moreover, can one bring some of the nuance available to those wishing to study power in the international system to the consideration of the power

⁵ Tony Blair in Metro (2007) *The Things Tony Said – Memorable Blair Quotes*. Available at: <https://metro.co.uk/2007/05/02/the-things-tony-said-memorable-blair-quotes-326038/> (Accessed: 20th May 2019).

⁶ Donald Trump in Woodward, B. (2018) *Fear: Trump in the White House*. Kindle Edition. London: Simon & Schuster. Loc.14.

⁷ Foucault, M. (1991) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin. 27.; Orwell, G. (2000) *1984*. London: Penguin Classics.

relations that PhD students need to navigate? Judging from the responses of workshop participants, there was certainly a desire to explore such questions. In a pre-workshop survey, responses to the questions 'What attracted you to the workshop?' and 'What do you hope to get out of the day?' included one participant stating they were eager to explore how 'differences' in nationality 'might affect power, as well as student positioning vis-a-vie more senior academics/colleagues' and a second stating they were drawn to the workshop because it aimed to 'bring together researchers from different' backgrounds to explore 'power relations and disparities'.⁸

The first session began this process with participants listing up to 10 people (or groupings of people if their network was particularly developed) with the capacity to influence their research, beginning with those (such as supervisors) with the ability to have the most impact. Participants were encouraged to think beyond academia and to include those, such as journalists exploring similar topics, that may have some connection to their work. Participants were instructed to follow academic protocols, such as using pseudonyms or anonymising people on their list if it was part of their research design.

Next, a table for codifying such relations beyond a list was introduced. Based around two axes related to formality and benefits, participants were encouraged to chart their

academic relationships on the table listed as *Table 1* below. Finally, participants were asked to map these relations on *Table 2*⁹ below, with distinctions made between formal and informal relations and the closeness of a relationship. This three-step process was designed to help participants quantify those with the potential to impact their research, to think about the importance of, and distinction between, formal and informal relations and, most importantly, to help participants visualise where they stood in their research network.

At the end of the workshop, one participant stated the material covered had developed their understanding of how to navigate 'power institutionally' and the importance of 'appreciating my own power/status/resources'. Another said he learnt about 'the relationship between power and early career researchers, both vertically and horizontally' and 'how to better engage with policy-focused audiences'. Finally, a third participant stated they 'gained [an] awareness' of the 'nature of existing relationships with people from my Uni, reconsidered [...] formality and realised that in relationships both parties can benefit and learn from each other'. They further stated engaging 'with the topic of power relations' in this manner had helped them think more about 'how to handle' their professional relationships.

The material used in this session is re-produced in The Appendix. If you feel it is beneficial, please re-use it in individual or group settings.

⁸ Workshop participants were asked to fill in this questionnaire prior to the start of the workshop. Completing the survey was optional, however, all participants chose to complete it. Participants also completed an optional survey

after the workshop had finished. These surveys are held on file by the author.

⁹ A blank version of this table is available in The Appendix.

	FORMAL RELATIONS		INFORMAL RELATIONS	
You benefit				
Collaboration/ Both parties Benefit				
Others benefit				

Table 1: Relationship Chart with formality and benefit axes

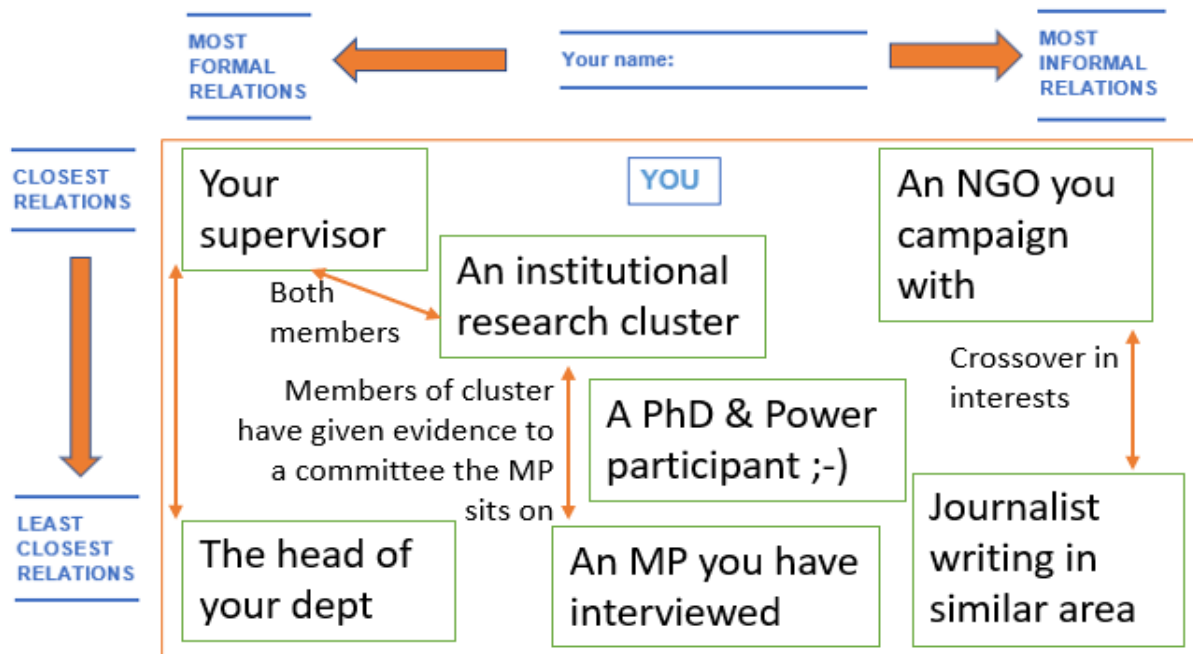


Table 2: Example relationship map with formality and closeness axis

Understanding Power

Discussions of power often occur in the consideration of the international realm. Indeed, it would probably be fair to characterise the international studies canon as saturated with such discussions. A search for ‘power and international relations’ on Amazon, for instance, returns over 10,000 results,¹⁰ with new sources added all the time. In recent years, notable additions have explored the racist underpinnings of the development of US centric IR theory,¹¹ an edited volume exploring the ability of states to adapt to uncertainty (so-called protean power)¹² and a volume that presents ‘22 secret strategies of global power’, framed as ‘universal rules’, that are ‘used by countries to protect themselves and to pursue their interests’.¹³ On a related note, there are various measures of power that inform discussions of the international system and the actions of state (and other) actors within it. The relative impacts of the military prowess, strategy and power of states such as the US and China, for instance, are frequently highlighted,¹⁴ whilst Germany (a US NATO ally) is often discussed with

regard to economic strength.¹⁵ Furthermore, structural power, which affords the ability to ‘extend or restrict the range of options open to others’, has been identified.¹⁶

Definitions of power can vary from the elegantly simplistic (‘the ability to get the outcomes one wants’)¹⁷ to the relational (‘A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do’).¹⁸ They also encompass the all encapsulating (the ‘means by which a state or other actor wields or can assert actual or potential influence or coercion relative to other states and nonstate actors because of the political, geographic, economic and financial, technological, military, social, cultural, or other capabilities it possesses’)¹⁹ and taxonomies designed to mitigate the fact that (according to some) ‘no single concept can capture [all] the forms of power in international politics’.²⁰ Moreover, different types of power, and attendant intellectual underpinnings, have been (and continue to be) codified: from soft (cultural) power,²¹ to hard (military) and smart power (defined as a combination

¹⁰ Search done 01/05/2020

¹¹ Vitalis, R. (2017) *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations*. London: Cornell University Press.

¹² Katzenstein, P.; Seybert, L. (eds) (2018) *Protean Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹³ Banos, P. (2019) *How They Rule the World: The 22 Secret Strategies of Global Power*. London: Ebury Press. Translated by Soutar, J.

¹⁴ Posen, B. (2008) Stability and Change in U.S. Grand Strategy. In *Orbis*. Vol. 51. No. 4. pp. 561-567.; Taylor Favel, M. (2008) China’s Search for Military Power. In *The Washington Quarterly*. Vol. 31. No. 3. pp. 125-141.; Walker, D. (2014) *CFR Brief: Trends in U.S. Military Spending*. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/sites/default/files/pdf/2012/08/Trends%20in%20US%20Military%20Spend>

[ing%202014_final.pdf](#) (Accessed: 30th April 2020).

¹⁵ Kundnani, H. (2011) Germany as a Geo-economic Power. In *The Washington Quarterly*. Vol. 34. No. 3. pp.31-45.

¹⁶ Strange, S. (1990) Finance, Information and Power. In *Review of International Studies*. Vol. 19. pp. 259-274. 259.

¹⁷ Nye, J. (2004) *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York, NY.: Public Affairs. 1.

¹⁸ Dahl, R. (1957) The Concept of Power. In *Behavioral Science*. Vol. 2. No. 3. pp. 201-215. 202-203.

¹⁹ Kauppi, M.; Viotti, P. (2013) *International Relations and World Politics, Fifth Edition*. London: Pearson. 200.

²⁰ Barnett, M.; Duvall, R. (2005) Power in International Politics. In *International Organization*. Vol. 59, No. 1. pp. 39-75. 67.

²¹ Nye, J. *Soft Power*.

of hard and soft power),²² via sharp power (derived from manipulating information and perceptions).²³ These (and other) conceptual models can offer students of the international system the intellectual building blocks needed to interpret relations between states.

In the workshop's second session Antonio Cerella, Senior Lecturer in Political Theory and International Studies at Kingston University and then Convenor of the BISA Working Group 'Contemporary Research on International Political Theory', provided a genealogy of the term power in a talk titled '*The Subject of Power*'. Cerella situated the term within a historic narrative encompassing ancient Rome, the 'clash and fusion of the Roman Empire and Christianity', papal power prior to the dawn of the modern age and the Reformation. In so doing, he highlighted the importance of 'forces capable of imposing norms' and argued that '[a]t every critical point in the history of the West, new models have arisen from the dialectical relation between a power that violently wanted to impose its truth and a subjugated minority, which opposed it in an implausible act of resistance'.²⁴ Beginning with Weber's maxim that 'power is 'the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance'', Cerella illustrated power is amorphous as it manifests itself in different ways and is contingent on both those with

power and those subjugated to it accepting its existence.



Antonio Cerella

Conceptually, Cerella wove a narrative taking in, among others, Max Weber's dominions of power, St. Augustine of Hippo's contributions to just war theory, Thomas Hobbes' musings on the need for a leviathan and Michel Foucault's regimes of truth. He characterised modern understandings of power as 'simplistic' and urged workshop participants to think 'beyond [solely] hierarchical understandings' of the concept. In short Cerella posited that current understandings of power can be traced to a tripartite of ideas (imperium, auctoritas and potestas) that shaped the government of the Roman Republic. Indeed, '[f]or the Romans there could be no force (*potestas*) without wisdom (*auctoritas*), and there could be no wisdom without truth and transcendence (*imperium*)'. As such, Cerella highlighted 'the compelling relation between different forms and sources of what we today simplistically call 'power''.

Speaking to more modern themes, Cerella argued the Weberian

²² Wilson, E. (2008) Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power. In *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Vol. 616. pp.110-124.

²³ Ludwig, J.; Walker, C. (2017) The Meaning of Sharp Power. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2017-11-16/meaning-sharp-power> (Accessed: 30th July 2019).

²⁴ A slightly developed version of the speech given by Antonio Cerella was published by the Philosophy in a Time of Crisis project.

Cerella, A. (2019) *On the Margins of Power*. Available at: <https://www.philosophyx.co.uk/cerellaonthemarginsofpower> (Accessed: 27th July 2019).

Some quotes from Antonio Cerella present here are from this online version of his speech, while others are from a video of his speech on file with the author.

idea of dominion ('where power manifests itself in actual commands') is 'closely related to discipline' that fosters the creation of Foucauldian 'regimes of truth' which 'believe that the authority of the state and its system of laws are not simply 'just' but also 'true'. Furthermore, it was asserted that within the current 'neo-liberal system of power in which dozens of neo-totalitarian discourses are flourishing, it is no longer possible to offer a detached resistance or to build one *ex nihilo* [out of nothing], out of the void of historical consciousness that distinguishes our era.' Instead, regimes of truth facilitate Foucauldian governmentalised 'power capable of normalising norms of behaviour'.

Turning to British Academia, and exercises such as the Research Excellence Framework (which sees the writing and societal impact of research occurring within UK universities ranked), Cerella argued such regimes create 'new forms of dominion that' have 'become almost unquestionable.' Noting that 'careers are made and destroyed on the basis of our intellectual proximity to the benchmarks decided by extra-academic forces' and the discourse they produce. Yet, rather than a one-way relationship, 'this discourse, as with all discourses, implies a two-fold process of subjectivation and self-subjectivation. Lots of carrots, so to speak, instead of the stick.'

There is an obvious need for a certain degree of hierarchy between a

supervisor and a student, and more broadly between a student and those more senior within an institution. Likewise, between organizational gate keepers and research students. Moreover, we have already noted the need for all researchers to be mindful of their own power. Yet, how then should postgraduate students go about carving a niche within a profession whose key purpose is supposedly the creation and distribution of new knowledge when faced with powerful actors? How does one navigate the tension between the need to generate new knowledge and understandings of the world and the fact that, (one presumes) in many cases such knowledge contributes to the reformulation of regimes of truth? How can the insights on simplistic understandings of power provided by Cerella help those wishing to understand their own location, both inside and outside the academy? Moreover, can the study of the international realm play, as many (including the author) believe it should, an emancipatory role?

In the next section, we focus on some practical pointers that may, in part, help PhD students navigate some such quandaries (though, unfortunately, certainly not all). While in the final section we draw insights from the experience of Professor Ruth Blakeley, who has faced such quandaries during her research into the post-9/11 CIA rendition system.

Navigating Power

The workshop's third session provided space for the discussion of networking and relationship building and maintenance. The session was co-written and co-delivered by Camilla Molyneux, a Researcher for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Drones and the author. Reflecting the counsel of Antonio Cerella to consider power in a more nuanced manner, participants were prompted to think of relations as a two-way street: more dialogue than pre-determined. Prior to discussions of participants' own relationships, some advice drawn from Molyneux and the author's experience was provided. To begin with, participants were advised to think carefully about who they wished to engage with and to think how they could reach people via their existing network. To facilitate this, participants were reminded networks are dynamic and operate both vertically and horizontally. Something that has consequences for attempting to reach those perceived as being of most value, but also for developing relationships with one's peers or those operating as gatekeepers.



Camilla Molyneux

When thinking about how to develop relationships, participants were urged to consider how they package themselves. In short, this involves thinking about how to present the best version of oneself. To do this, participants were encouraged to consider presenting themselves as offering something to contacts (be it

access to sources, intellectual engagement, a platform for dissemination, access to one's own contacts...). In sum, participants were encouraged to reflect on how they could present new relationships as win-win situations. Finally, rather than thinking of relationships as the making of a singular point of contact, the need to think longer-term and foster relationships was highlighted. Obviously, specifics vary, but this could involve maintaining regular email or phone contact, meeting face-to-face, ensuring new contacts benefit from the relationship and suggesting avenues for cooperation.

A Simple Networking Rubric

Further reflection following the workshop led to the development of a simple rubric that has helped the author deal with his own networking related anxiety. Based around three simple terms (relaxation, enjoyment, patience), this rubric was integrated into a session at the British International Studies Association Postgraduate Network Conference at Portsmouth University in April 2019.

Relaxation:

From my own experience (as well as anecdotes from the workshop and the Portsmouth session), one of the main impediments to successful networking is the stress associated with it. Yet, rather than focusing on the importance of any particular engagement, it is likely that, if PhD students attend conferences and talks and get involved with groups such as BISA (whether by involvement with the Postgraduate Network, subject working groups or other means) then multiple chances to develop relationships will transpire. Moreover, as familiarity with

more senior academics emerges, such relationships will likely develop naturally. On another note, it may be the most valuable relationships are with those at a similar career stage, whether within the academy or another arena like political parties. Within the political realm, for instance, those working for MPs are probably quite powerful as gatekeepers as they help determine what material and people an MP engages with. In short, while it might be slightly less intimidating to approach such gatekeepers, they may be important contacts moving forward. Similarly, within academia, it could be that others early in their career are more amenable to collaborating on projects such as special issues or edited volumes (there is certainly no harm in asking!).

Enjoyment:

When considering networking, a tendency to only think strategically about your engagements may occur. However, many people study a topic or are engaged in a specific policy arena because of prior experience and/or because they are passionate about it. Such passion and experience will likely make engaging with them interesting and enjoyable. This is not to say one should not maintain professionalism. However, enjoying your interactions may allow you to gain more from them, while also providing a more positive

picture of yourself and, hopefully, allowing you to relax.

Patience:

Finally, relationships, and the trust they can lead to, develop across time rather than from a singular interaction. This is certainly likely to be the case when people deal with sensitive topics and material: perhaps especially so for many studying or developing and implementing policy related to the international realm. As such, do not expect relationships to develop quickly. Instead, be prepared to invest time and effort over a prolonged period and do not be deterred by short-term setbacks such as an email not being responded to (many people are overworked and time poor) or a first interaction that, for you at least, appeared awkward or embarrassing, it may have gone better than you thought. Remember, everyone(!) has been early on in their career at some point.

With this rubric in mind, this briefing paper, as the workshop did, closes by turning to the reflections of a scholar who has consistently attempted to challenge power, whilst simultaneously attempting to remain mindful of her own power and responsibilities: Professor Ruth Blakeley.

Speaking Truth to Power

Since 2010 Professor Ruth Blakeley of Sheffield University has, along with her research partner, Dr Sam Raphael of Westminster University, challenged state power by exposing aspects of the post 9/11-CIA rendition system: a system which transported detainees across international borders beyond the boundaries of international law and held at least 119 detainees. A number of these detainees were subjected to torture by the CIA and its partners. Blakeley and Raphael have engaged in this research via an ESCR funded project titled The Rendition Project.²⁵ Surmising their original goal, Blakeley states The Rendition Project was set up to 'map' the CIA's detention system. This goal was motivated by a normative objection to the use of torture in the system. As Blakeley notes, many detainees 'have never had any charges brought against them' and have been 'so badly tortured that anything they said would not stand up in a court of law because it was obtained through torture', meaning 'the whole thing's a complete mess in legal terms before you even get on to morals and ethics.'²⁶

Codifying their main achievements, Blakeley notes The Rendition Project has been able to make 'certain interventions outside of academia that mean rendition is better understood than it otherwise would have been', that it has been able to detail the extent of the CIA's program, to uncover facts about particular prisoners and provide a better understanding of the CIA's ability 'to

play cat and mouse with investigative processes'. Evidence derived from The Rendition Project's work has, among other things, been used in the defence of Guantanamo detainees, been cited in parliamentary inquiries and sparked police investigations.



Professor Ruth Blakeley

Reflecting on rendition and secrecy, Blakeley noted that, while 'data on human rights violations is always partial because governments want to keep their dirty secrets secret', the 'CIA took secrecy to a whole new level' with rendition by doing 'really quite cynical things like [...] filing false flight requests' by making 'requests for aircraft to go to two separate locations.' Conversely, the CIA 'also spectacularly messed up', with a rendition team, for example, sent to Italy using 'their own names and [...] credit cards instead of aliases. This 'led to 17 individuals being tried in absentia'.

Turning to the UK, The Rendition Project's work has shown 'just how much British involvement there' was, with the UK contributing 'materially to rendition' by facilitating 'operations'. Among other things, The Rendition Project has documented that 'several hundred' flights connected to renditions landed in the UK. A finding which

²⁵ The author was a Research Assistant for The Rendition Project from April 2011 to September 2012.

The website of The Rendition Project is available here:
The Rendition Project (2020) *Home Page*. Available at:

<https://www.therenditionproject.org.uk/>
(Accessed: 26th February 2020).

²⁶ Unless otherwise attributed, material in this section comes from the speech given by Professor Ruth Blakeley as the keynote speaker of the PhD & the Powerful workshop.

undermined a 2006 claim from then Foreign Secretary Jack Straw that ‘two flights connected to rendition had landed in the UK’.²⁷ Importantly, the project’s work, in-part via Blakeley and Raphael’s testimony to the UK Intelligence and Security Committee, has ‘sparked a consultation into the guidance given to British officials collaborating with third-party states’, has fed into the work of the cross-party UK All Party Parliamentary Group on Rendition and led to a ‘consultation’ about how the UK trains MI5, MI6 and the UK military ‘about collaborating [with] partners overseas where torture is a risk.’

Despite this, the payoffs of Blakeley and Raphael’s work are ‘somewhat unknown’. While there have been ‘calls in Britain for a judge led inquiry’ and for MI5 and MI6 personnel ‘responsible to be prosecuted’, in summer 2019 the UK government announced no such inquiry would take place.²⁸ Ruminating on whether the UK government is ever going to ‘rule out torture’ as a result of her work, Blakeley stated ‘of course not’, citing the UK’s ‘history of carving out little pockets of space where these things can happen’ as contextual evidence. However, what Blakeley and Raphael have been able to do is ‘improve public understanding’, have ‘some impact on how the UK government is thinking about its torture policy’ and furthered what is ‘known about the CIA’s dirty business.’ Urging realistic expectations, Blakeley encouraged participants to think about

‘what’s possible,’ explaining that ‘achievements can be relatively modest but can still be really profound’. According to Blakeley, maintaining such perspective has been important in ‘expectation setting’ about The Rendition Project’s work.

The Rendition Project has also helped humanise those the CIA held. They were, for instance, approached by legal representatives of a Guantanamo Bay detainee, Khaled Sheikh Mohammed, who is profiled on The Rendition Project website.²⁹ The photo of Mohammed on the website was from when Mohammed, who is accused of involvement in planning 9/11 and was waterboarded by the CIA,³⁰ was first captured and showed him in a dishevelled state. His representatives asked if this photo could be swapped for one taken by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) portraying him in a more positive light. The ICRC photo is now on the profile page. Blakeley believes this change was important because, regardless of their, real or alleged, prior actions, detainees such as Mohammed are human and the ‘framing of an individual can send all sorts of messages and connotations’.

As Blakeley points out, central to any project should be a robust research methodology. Something that is especially so if one is challenging the nefarious practices of powerful states. As such, ensuring ‘the robustness of’ The Rendition Project’s research has been key to others taking the work of

²⁷ BBC (2006) ‘Rendition flights’ landed in UK. Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/4817374.stm (Accessed: 28th July 2019).

²⁸ Bowcott, O. (2019) *Theresa May Carpeted Over Refusal to Launch New Torture Inquiry*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2019/jul/18/former-tory-minister-accuses-government-of-failing-to-ban-torture> (Accessed: 28th July 2019).

²⁹ The Rendition Project (2019) *Khaled Sheikh Mohammed*. Available at: <https://www.therenditionproject.org.uk/prisoner/s/khaled-sheikh-mohammed.html> (Accessed: 28th July 2019).

³⁰ Filkins, D. (2014) *Khaled Sheikh Mohammed and the C.I.A.*. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/khalid-sheikh-mohammed-cia> (Accessed: 28th July 2019).

Blakeley and Raphael seriously. Firstly, they knew 'litigators wanted to be able to use it in court'. Thus, 'it had to be damn good'. Secondly, due to the 'conspiracy theorising around issues of national security', '[b]eing rigorous' methodologically allowed them to be 'honest about gaps in data and really clear about' how 'decisions' were made and whether they could be 'certain a rendition had happened or whether' they were 'just suspicious' about a flight. Thirdly, it aided them when appearing before the UK parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee. Prior to their testimony Blakeley and Raphael assumed the committee would be 'hostile', would try to 'trap' or dismiss them and the process would be a 'whitewash'. Instead, according to Blakeley, 'it was an absolute revelation'.

The committee was 'obsessed [with their] [...] methodology' because '[t]hey were absolutely determined to find out how confident they could be about' their data and 'wanted to test' them 'on how robust it was' and how, for example, 'decisions between [the labelling of] suspicious flights and confirmed flights' had been made. Initially, Blakeley and Raphael had 'thought they wanted' them 'to be cautious', but 'actually what they wanted [...] was a really strong assertion' of their 'confidence in' their 'data', which they were able to give. Broadening out her insight, Blakeley said the experience 'underlines' that they 'were taken seriously by the committee because' they took 'so much care' methodologically and with their publications.

While Blakeley and Raphael are the only 'academics who have rigorously got to grips with what the CIA was doing', Blakeley emphasised the

importance of their engagements with non-academic partners such as journalists, legal professionals and non-governmental organisations. This process has not always gone smoothly as, initially, they could not gain traction for their research. In part, this was because it did not occur to them to 'read the papers and find out which journalists actually write' on rendition 'and contact them' directly. However, once they 'worked out that Ian Cobain³¹ [...] was the only serious British journalist who had covered the story endlessly [...] it was easy'.

Building on the advice provided by Camilla Molyneux for those thinking of engaging with non-academic partners such as non-governmental organisations, Blakeley urged workshop participants to be respectful of their needs and ensure the relationship is mutually beneficial. Elaborating, she explained:

'one of the reasons human rights organisations can be suspicious of academics is that quite often what they're doing is investigation and research. To be answerable to their own funders they have to be able to show that they have found out something new. They have produced new knowledge about human rights violations. So if a bunch of academics go and take their data and publish stuff to say we found out all this about human rights violations, the human rights organisation loses its own unique selling point to its funders and that's a real problem.'

In short, Blakeley said 'finding the right journalist, finding the right organisation and working on investing in that relationship' is worth it in the long run, but 'takes time and [...] lots of effort, it

³¹ See for instance: Cobain, I. (2013) *Cruel Britannia: A Secret History of Torture*. London: Portobello Books.

takes being open to building trust.' Surmising the engagement she and Raphael have had with non-academic partners such as litigators and non-governmental organisations, Blakeley says they have 'learnt a huge amount', but, in return, have given 'back some pretty robust data that helped them prove the cases of the people that they were representing' and 'gave them evidence of a quality that could be used in international courts to make the case that these people really were victims of torture.'

Another important lesson Blakeley has learnt relates to her power as a researcher. A power that can contribute positively to the ability to investigate powerful actors, but also brings important ethical obligations. Positively, Blakeley noted that '[a]s a researcher who takes your methodological and ethical principles seriously you do actually have more power than you assume you do'. Crucially, this 'power can be wielded [...] building networks with like-minded groups working on similar' topics. Yet, it also opens up the 'capacity' for abuses to arise from the 'choices' a researcher makes about the people and organisations they work with, how they 'work with them' and how they 'treat them'.

Speaking to the work of The Rendition Project, Blakeley noted that she and Raphael had 'a set of choices to make about how we interacted with the victims' of rendition. In some cases, victims are 'unreachable', while some 'are free and able and willing to talk'. Whilst others are free but 'not comfortable' discussing 'their experiences'. Ultimately, they 'took a decision not to interview any' of the victims, an 'ethical' choice based on several factors. Firstly, Blakeley explains, 'if you interview a torture

victim it is a bit like interrogating them and they've been interrogated under torture, so there's a set of duty of care issues there that are really really important'. Relatedly, while Blakeley admitted being 'qualified to do a lot of things', unlike the litigators they have worked with, she is 'not qualified to interview torture victims' as she does not have the requisite training and qualifications. As such, Blakeley believes the decision not to engage with victims of rendition was '[a]bsolutely the right call'.

When discussing how to deal with controversial findings, Blakeley advised participants to use the 'publishing process' as 'a safety valve'. Positing that if 'you are publishing your findings in reputable journals, that tells the funding council that your work is respected and well regarded by your peers'. Blakeley also encouraged participants to think about how others may use the insight and data they create by reflecting on ways to control the impact of research. While there are no simple answers, participants were encouraged to ask themselves if anyone may want to use their data for nefarious purposes, to reflect on how this might be done and, as such, how, and if, one could maintain some control over the data produced. Finally, participants were urged to reflect on how, and if, they will walk the line between academic work and activism.

Reflecting on key takeaways from a decade of work by The Rendition Project, Blakeley said it demonstrated the need to work through setbacks, illustrated the ability to find 'power in unexpected places' and demonstrated one 'can feel more power if you start to connect with people who are working on similar topics'.

Conclusion: Reflections on The PhD and the Powerful

The PhD and the Powerful project was initiated out of a desire to explore my own networking related anxieties (and a suspicion that others had similar anxieties), along with a wish to investigate whether theoretical frameworks developed in the field of international studies that relate to power are of use to those wishing to understand their own place within broader power structures. There was also an inclination these two strands were, in some important sense, connected and best explored alongside each other and in conjunction with other scholars. It was this inclination, as well as the support of a large number of individuals and those who sat on the British International Studies Association Postgraduate Network Committee in 2017-18 and 2018-19, that led to the PhD and the Powerful Workshop taking place at Kingston University in November 2018.

Whether the workshop or this briefing paper have fully dealt with my networking related anxieties and/or those of workshop participants is, as of the time of writing in March 2020, at least a partially unanswered question. I certainly still feel what numerous workshop participants labelled 'the fear' when faced with a room of people I do not know. That said, keeping the rubric introduced in this brief's third section in mind when I enter such situations certainly helps reduce my stress levels and allows me to speak to more people than I would have done before beginning the PhD and the Powerful project. Likewise, in a post workshop survey, a participant said the workshop had 'provided the opportunity to exchange experiences with other PhD students from various universities and research areas', 'enriched' their 'knowledge of networking' within

'industry and academia' and allowed them to engage 'with the topic of power relations' within academia and beyond and helped them learn' how to handle' networking. While this brief cannot reproduce the immersive experience of the workshop, it is hoped it has captured the main networking related insights the workshop generated and, via the material produced in The Appendix, will allow others to think about their network in a more systematic fashion moving forward.

Turning to the more conceptual material the workshop aimed to explore, a similar picture emerges. Though there is likely much more work needed to fully investigate how, and if, theoretical insights related to the study of power can help PhD students (and academics in general) conceptualise their place in broader power relations, the discussions that occurred during the workshop, especially in the second session, have helped me more firmly understand my location institutionally and within broader academic power structures. Reflecting this, workshop participants praised the 'interesting discussion on power relations' that took place during the workshop and the fact the workshop had 'enabled' them 'to think more critically about power relationships within academia [...] and IR'. Moreover, when answering the question 'What, if any, have been the key learning points you will take away from the workshop?', one participant said the discussions of 'different approaches to study "power"' and another highlighted Antonio Cerella's '[t]heoretical talk on power'. It is hoped readers are similarly prompted to reflect on the diversity available to those wishing to study power within the field of international studies and that this leads to further consideration of the

place of PhD students within (and their effect on) broader power structures.

Finally, an often-cited proverb states that with (great) power comes (great) responsibility. So ubiquitous has this proverb become that, after its frequent use in the Spider-Man franchise, it is also known as the Peter Parker Principal. As Ruth Blakeley explored in her talk, the Peter Parker Principal (though not using this label) brings with it the need to make decisions that can impact people in

important ways. Indeed, the need to keep ethical responsibilities at the forefront of one's mind is as key in the arena of international studies as it is in other areas of academic work that touch on the human experience such as medical and legal research. In short, it is hoped this brief prompts readers to reflect on their own power as researchers and to continually strive to embed sound research ethics into their research plans.

The Appendix

- 1) Relations List Sheet
- 2) Relationship Chart with formality and benefit axes
- 3) relationship map with formality and closeness axis

1) Relations List Sheet



The PHD & the Powerful Workshop

- Make a list of all those that you have relations with that connect to, and the ability to have an impact on, your research
- Begin with those that are most obvious (i.e. your supervisor) and then move outwards
- Remember to follow academic protocols and best practice (i.e. if you have promised to refer to someone by a synonym in your research then do so here)
- It will likely help in some cases to think beyond individuals (i.e. a research cluster, a department or an institution)
- If your network is particularly developed, then you may have a list longer than 10. That said, grouping into clusters (i.e. journalists) may help you for the purposes of the day


Your name:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)
- 7)
- 8)
- 9)
- 10)

2) Relationship Chart with formality and benefit axes

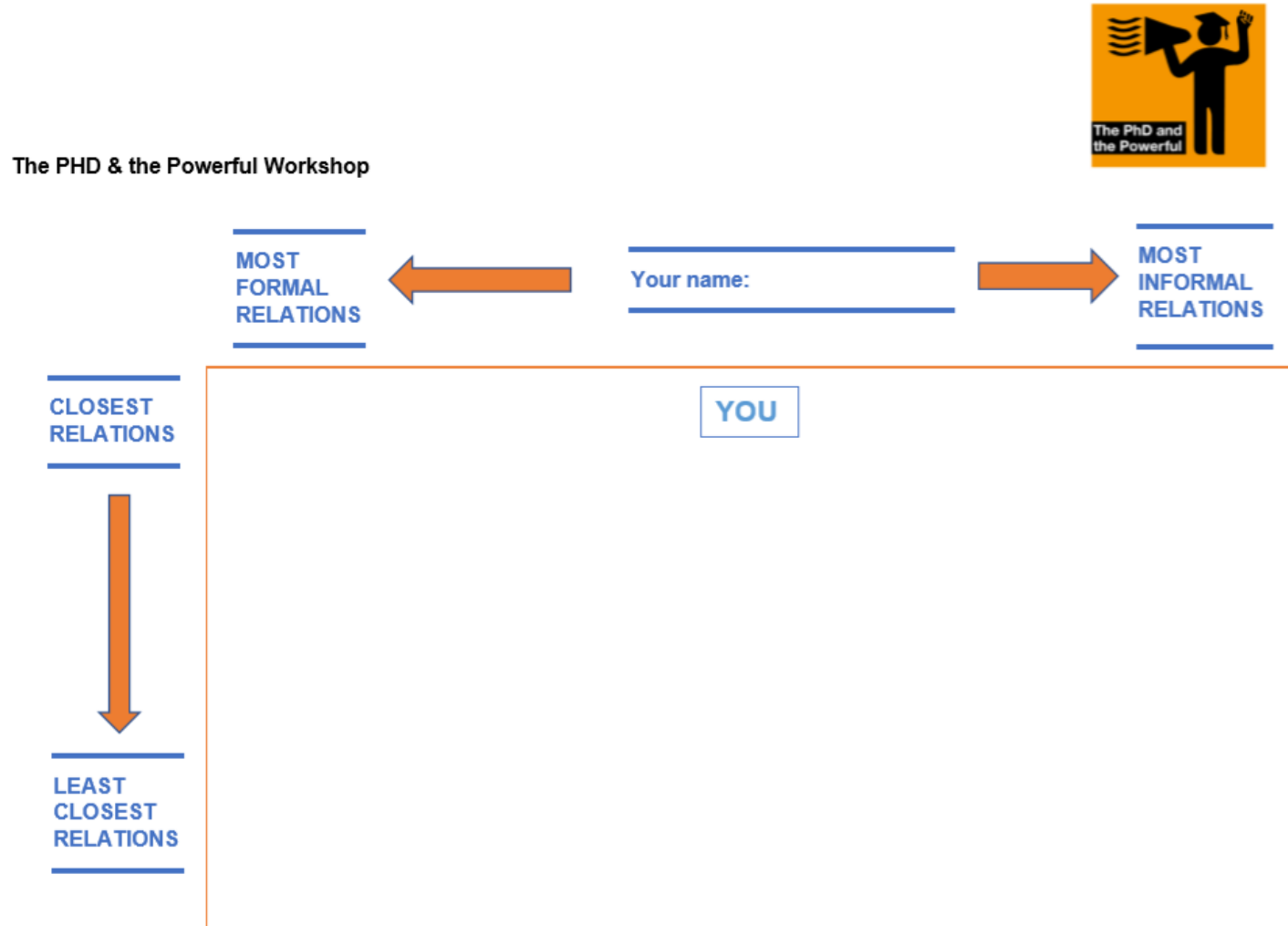


The PHD & the Powerful Workshop

FORMAL RELATIONS ←  **INFORMAL RELATIONS**

You benefit					
Collaboration/ Both parties Benefit					
Others benefit					

3) Relationship map with formality and closeness axis



Acknowledgements and Biographies

Acknowledgements: The PhD and the Powerful project would not have been possible without the support of many people. Tom Watts helped me develop the idea after I pitched it to him in his role as the Chair of the BISA Postgraduate Network. After a last-minute plea, Tom also helped me administer the first workshop session. Radu Cinpoes, Antonio Cerella and Atsuko Ichijo all commented usefully on my workshop funding application, whilst the professional staff at Kingston University (most particularly Helen Miller and Lucy Raymond) were fantastic in helping me with the logistics of the event. Monica Patel organised the fantastic graphic motif. Huge thanks must go to Antonio Cerella, Camilla Molyneux and Ruth Blakeley for all instantly agreeing to participate in the workshop and creating original material far beyond what I could have initially envisaged. Amandine Hostein, Tom's successor as BISA Postgraduate Network Chair, very kindly invited me to deliver a workshop on networking at the 2019 BISA Postgraduate Network Conference. All workshop attendees engaged enthusiastically with the subject material and, it is fair to say, this brief would be much diminished without the insights gleaned from their participation. Finally, Atsuko, Tom, Amandine and Robert Ledger all read and provided excellent feedback on drafts of this brief. To all mentioned here, I am in your debt. Thanks!

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Antonio Cerella is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Politics, International Relations and Human Rights, Kingston University. From 2015 to 2018 he was Convenor of CRIPT–British International Studies Association working group on Contemporary Research on International Political Theory. He is a member of the Advisory Board of the Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence. He has previously worked at University of Central Lancashire, the School of Global Studies at the University of Sussex and at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

Camilla Molyneux is a Research Consultant in the UK parliament working on conflict, civilian protection in armed conflict and parliamentary accountability and oversight over the use of military force. There, Molyneux conducts analysis and writes reports aimed at informing policy decisions and advising lawmakers. Molyneux has managed qualitative research projects in Yemen and Saudi Arabia and her work has been presented in the UK Parliament, at academic conferences and will be featured as chapters in upcoming books. Previously, she was the Human Rights Officer at the Norwegian Embassy to Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Bahrain and Oman.

Ruth Blakeley is a Professor of Politics and International Relations at the University of Sheffield. She is the Vice Chair of the British International Studies Association (BISA) and was lead Editor of the Review of International Studies from 2016 to 2020. She is a member of the editorial advisory boards for several journals. She holds a PhD from the University of Bristol and has previously worked at University of Kent. She held several leadership positions at Kent, including Head of School of Politics and International Relations (2016), and Sub-Dean and Director of Graduate Studies for the Faculty of Social Sciences (2012-2015). She was appointed Director of the White Rose Social Sciences Doctoral Training Partnership at Sheffield from Sept 2017 to January 2020. The collected findings of The Rendition Project were published in 2019 in: Black, C.; Blakeley, R.; Raphael, S. (2019) *CIA Torture Unredacted*.



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