

10-18-2008

## International Perspectives on International Studies

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### Recommended Citation

Hovey, Rebecca, "International Perspectives on International Studies" (2008). Conference Proceeding, Smith College, Northampton, MA.  
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International Studies Association South  
Randolph-Macon College

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October 18 2008

Panel: International Perspectives on International Studies

Over the past two decades, American higher education has seen an exponential growth in study abroad, with almost every U.S. college or university adopting strategic plans and policies to internationalize the curriculum and campus. This trend is associated with at least three key elements that bear significantly on the mission and purpose of the university as a site of knowledge generation and production. These are:

1. Curriculum integration between the home campus departments and study abroad program offerings
2. Construction of global campuses and/or joint degree programs abroad
3. Promotion of the values of global citizenship and global service learning.

Each of these elements can be associated with positive innovation in higher education as well as problematic assumptions in terms of how internationalization is linked to questions of knowledge and power. It relates to what students are learning and how this connects to the underlying purpose of academic institutions in the generation and production of knowledge. The theme of this conference points to an underlying question that has yet to be fully addressed and debated within the academy: as international education (IE) is mainstreamed, and increasingly becomes both an expectation and assumption of university education, what is the nexus between international education and international studies (IS)?

This panel was organized to examine this question from a different lens and start by asking: What are the international perspectives on international studies?

- What expectations do these institutions have of international education and how does this affect programmatic learning outcomes in International Studies?
- How are the theoretical paradigms and academic thinking within the disciplines approached by international faculty outside the U.S.?
- How does inclusion of other voices, views and knowledge frameworks beyond those traditionally taught in the U.S. enhance International Studies programs?

In other words, in order to fully understand the nexus between IE and IS, we need to understand how our IE counterparts outside the U.S. engage in IS as a profession, discipline and site of learning.

The debates around “what is international” in international studies are not new. Steve Smith, a former president of the ISA, has roundly critiqued the International Relations field, the dominant discipline within the ISA, as dominated by a U.S.-centric world view and set of theoretical

assumptions that work to silence alternative ways of thinking and knowing.<sup>1</sup> From a Foucauldian perspective, he views this as a “regime of truth” in which power and knowledge are intricately linked and serve to reproduce and support each other.

Arlene Tickner, an IR scholar working at the University of the Andes in Colombia, has extended this work to examine how academics in the third world approach IR and IS, and how these approaches are lost by traditional paradigms within IR. I want to draw on some important points she makes in her 2003 article “See IR Differently: Notes from the Third World”.

In examining the theoretical paradigms, structures and institutional systems that govern IR, she establishes an organizational sociology of the field by claiming that IR is

1. “constitutive of international practice” – it “recreates and reaffirms” its knowledge of practice
2. The field itself is socially constructed and relates as much to the constructivism of IR as a practice as much as social constructivism is a theoretical stance within the discipline, and
3. The field is “self-referential” or “autistic” in that its constructs often do not allow it to see issues or realities that are not already defined.

Tickner provides several examples of this institutional practice in IR. One of these is the concept of state systems, a fundamental analytical device within IR. Notions of strong and weak states, or failed and “quasi-states” have been utilized to examine international inequalities and systems viewed as prevalent in the “developing” or third world. Scholars operating from 3W perspectives, however, argue that the notion of states as a primary category for explaining local realities is imposed through theoretical paradigms that explain politics through the lens of state sovereignty, legitimacy or territorial integrity.

Often however, these categories are applied in terms of the negative characteristics of state structures – they are defined in terms of what they are not. The terms “weak, quasi, failed, corrupt, incomplete, backward, etc.” ....

*“reproduce representational practices in which the third world is defined by what it lacks; they also assume the state is unproblematic as a primary category of IR.” (p. 315)*

She goes on to note that

*“in much of the global south, either the state is not the principal arbiter of political and social relations, or its deficiencies are attributed to the workings of the international system itself.” (p.315)*

Tickner argues instead that concepts and analytical approaches that fully describe and attempt to resolve third world challenges need to emerge from practices that focus on local cultural practices, hybridity as a notion of negotiation strategies in cultural encounters, and the practices of everyday life that shape the actual work experience of the 3W scholar. (She cites her own life-world in war-torn Colombia.)

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<sup>1</sup> This borrows on a longer literature dating back to Stanley Hoffman.

Tickners' work is especially relevant because she points to the disconnect that can occur for students who are taught IS from an dominant perspective in the U.S.. These approaches privilege particular paradigms and analytical frameworks that shape students' ways of seeing when they go abroad. Yet students over and over talk about how their international learning experiences transform they way they see the world. They are not simply gaining the empirical field knowledge that confirms or challenges existing theoretical questions brought from the U.S. If it is effective in offering a fully intercultural learning experience – from the standpoint of the IE profession – the students will be learning to see the world differently, to attempt to gain even a glimpse of another world view from different cultural and epistemological standpoints.

How does this happen and what does it mean for International Studies? I personally think it can have profound implications if we can find a way to “translate” the knowledge gained abroad back into the disciplines. I want to share some examples of student work from a program that is designed to let students conduct field work abroad guided by scholars and/or practitioners that serve as mentors and cultural informants. Students are also reading a much larger share of publications by local scholars, printed by local publishing houses. They also conduct field work and typically include an ethnographic study or set of interviews with the local population.

One student's paper on

**Engendered Spaces: An Analysis of the Formation and Perpetuation of Female Spheres in Ghana**

This student conducts a participant observation study in market places of Ghana, and concludes her paper with reflections on the problem of attempting to analyze local gender relations from a lens of Western feminism, a perspective shared by many Ghanaian feminists. She seeks to dispel the notion of the “downtrodden” African woman and highlights the value of work as a symbol of women's status in Ghana. Notions of class or urban/rural divides are not supported in her interviews with women. She concludes though in noting:

*“While the issue of women's marginalized social and economic status needs to be revealed, ... primary attention most likely not be directly related to the plight of women as to the economic struggle of the country in general. ... women's troubles become the nation's troubles.”*

In another study based in Argentina, entitled

**Construyendo un tudi modelo: Un tudio de la relación entre los piqueteros K y el gobierno**

The student examines the piquetero movement that emerged in Buenos Aires. He finds that while the group originally functioned and could be explained in terms of social movement literature, relations with the Kirchner government resulted in new and unexpected cooperation between the piquetero movements and the government. He writes:

*“The objective of this study is to critically look at this new relationship that is being constructed between certain piquetero organizations and the government of Kirchner. Focusing on groups, Movimiento Barrios de Pie and Movimiento Evita, this investigation poses the following questions: Why have the piquetero organizations decided to affiliate themselves with the Kirchnerismo? How do they understand their new relationship? How has the relationship*

*affected their goals, structure, forms of collective action, and autonomy? This essay tries to draw conclusions of the nature of the new relationship and what means for the piquetero organizations movement.”*

He finds that “popular class” identity (clases populares) in Argentina have shifted from the workplace to the barrio and taken on new locally-based political agendas. This is seen as an important shift from Peronist politics of 20<sup>th</sup> century Argentinian politics. His research is based on local interviews, document analysis of the barrio movements, and observation of protest activities. With the exception of one reference to Tilly’s work on repertoires of action as historical resources for future action in the historical section of the paper, he relies fully on the academic perspectives of local Argentinean scholars published locally on this topic. He adopts a view proposed by local scholars as the emergence of politics based on the mobilization of resources.

*Cuando comenzó esta investigación, pensé que la conexión entre los piquetero oficialistas y el gobierno era un regreso al clientismo del aparto peronista. Mirando desde afuera, parecia que los grupos piqueteros han dejado sus ideas revolucionarias a cambio de acceso a los beneficios del estado.... Sin embargo, lo que encuentre fue una relacion mas compleja y dialectica.*

Tickner notes that alternative perspectives in IR need to be rooted in culture, hybridity and everyday life. The student work cited here arises out of this kind of learning and is still “fresh” and “raw” based on their relatively short period of studying abroad and completing their paper. What happens though when they pack up, return to campus and begin approaching their faculty advisor or local undergraduate research office with ideas of turning their work into a senior thesis or Fulbright proposal? Is this emergent field knowledge subordinated to mainstream IS paradigms in order to be understood and accepted as legitimate knowledge? More often students find a friendly professor who will allow them to write their work up with a “marginal” reflective theoretical view, i.e. to let this be a learning experience, but this is often not seen as the stepping stone to professional preparation as an emerging academic in the discipline. In other words, there are power and privilege assumptions that begin to play out early in the phase of students returning to their U.S. campuses with this emergent new knowledge they have gained abroad.

What does this mean for the elements of internationalization I mentioned at the outset that are the nodes of institutional connections between IE and IS?

One, curriculum integration. At many institutions, this still is discussed in terms of whether the content of a course of program studied abroad matches the accepted curriculum content of a similar course at the home campus. It is a process dominated by credit transfer discussions, registrars offices concerned with accreditation concerns if the content does not match official course listings, and often by faculty who feel only their institution can offer the best instruction in a particular topic or field so the accepted course need to complement or supplement their teaching. Within IE, even after the growth of the past 20 years, we are still struggling to explain



that the value of studying abroad is to gain perspectives and learning experiences that CANNOT be gained at the home campus or even in a traditional classroom setting.

This connects to the second point, the creation of global campuses and joint degree programs. Earlier this year the NY Times featured a series of articles on the proliferation of U.S. universities setting up branch campuses abroad. A sad feature of their observations was the extent to which many of these campuses strive to provide the comfortable student support and residential life that they are accustomed to at home. In terms of student life, often these branch campuses result in a kind of bubble that protects students from the local culture rather than providing appropriate ways of fully immersing in the local culture through local educational and community structures. But, more critically in terms of IS, is the continued link of the U.S. control over the curriculum through U.S. based accreditation standards and on-sight faculty. It is very difficult to set up branch campuses or even joint degree programs that allow the host institution full academic oversight of the curriculum. What is taught, how it is taught, who teaches, and what is deemed credit-worthy support the power and dominance of particular ways of knowing and developing within the respective professions.

Third, the promotion of global citizenship through study abroad. Often simply the experience of living abroad is considered to be a way in which students can gain respect and understanding of other cultures needed for this ideal of gaining global awareness and responsibility for ones actions as a citizen “of the world”. Students themselves often discuss this in position and powerful ways, yet there are cautionary concerns. A former SIT Study Abroad student recently published an essay in the Chronicle critiquing this notion and expressing her concern that the field of study abroad commodifies culture and reproduces global power structures through the privileges that even allow U.S. students to live and study in non-traditional field sites. How can we develop a critical yet morally responsible notion of global citizenship that allows for authentic and mutual exchanges of IE programs in their communities? How do we support this learning of citizenship upon the students’ return?

I want to conclude by returning to Tickner’s recommendation of “border thinking” and intellectual trading spaces as a space in which IE and IS can meet our counterparts from abroad and truly develop a community of knowledge that deepens and broadens our intellectual paradigms and perspectives within the academy. Borrowing from the notion of global citizenship, this is also a process of democratization of knowledge production that allows the global “other” to be co-producers of knowledge of the world.

We need to find ways to allow for an opening of the curriculum to include publications, voices, and knowledge from sources outside the canon in our respective disciplines.

We need to build our educational programming through local partnerships, reciprocal exchanges with communities where we operate programs, and inclusion of local academics in the teaching.

We need to fully explore what this notion of global citizenship means within the academy and its academic disciplines. I return to a question Steve Smith frequently poses: “Where is the international in international studies?” and how do we ensure a more open and pluralistic community of practice in our own professions?