The Bigger Story

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The contributors to this symposium have told a dismal, altogether depressing story about the way influential political scientists in the US treat constructivist scholars and their work in the field of international relations (IR). The evidence that Subotic and Zarakol draw from TRIP surveys and other readily available sources, not to mention Struett's anecdotal evidence (to which any one of us could add), suggests the prevailing attitude is somewhere between contempt and indifference. Indeed it is a dismissive attitude that most political scientists would find politically offensive and would routinely condemn in other settings. A dismissive attitude has tangible consequences: we who are constructivists by any definition find ourselves and our work collectively, silently, effectively dismissed. We don't belong in those top 25 departments whose faculty rosters Subotic inspected. We don't get published in the pages of the top-ranked journals Zarakol examined. We get no respect, and neither does what we have to say.

There is little I can add to what the contributors have already said. Instead, I want to tell a bigger, no less dismal and depressing story. Political scientists at top-ranked departments in the US are increasingly treating IR the way that IR scholars in those departments are treating constructivists. Americanists and comparativists dismiss IR. They treat it as dispensable, not worthy of respect, and therefore not worthy of status-conferring senior appointments, scarce tenure lines, and space in top political science journals. The IR scholars who give constructivism no respect are themselves getting less and less respect in their own departments. In this circumstance, who can be surprised if those beleaguered IR scholars pretend a deviant minority in their midst doesn't even exist.

I have no hard evidence to support this tendentious claim or even the story of which it is a part. I have scrolled through the faculty rosters of the top-ranked departments, and what I see I think strikingly supports my conviction that IR is on the ropes. Of course I acknowledge my own interests are likely to taint my conclusions. Perhaps what I see is my generation (those of us born, say, before 1950) fading away, not IR, and the story I tell is an old soldier's lament. When I recently told this story in Europe, a well-known constructivist scholar, who is a generation younger and teaches in Canada, flat out disagreed with me—it's not what he sees. I don't doubt that evidence of the sort that Subotic and Zarakol assembled, taken back 30 years (e.g., 1985, 1995, 2005, 2015), would settle the matter. If it shows me wrong, I will happily change my story. Meanwhile, I can muster some reasons—soft, circumstantial evidence—to make the story at least plausible enough to warrant further consideration.

According to the symposium contributors, the big reason constructivism gets no respect in IR is the rise and near hegemony of a highly formalized, conventionalized, indeed ritualized methodology (and its rarely articulated warrants) rather too loosely called *positivism* and, behind it, "scientism in US academia" (Subotic, this issue). This is, in my view, the very same reason that IR is so steadily losing ground as a field of political science. Positivism depends on large, well-demarcated data sets rendering aggregate behavior amenable to rational explanation and reducing anomalous (deviant, irrational) behavior to statistical insignificance. The massive institutionalization and public availability of "the political" in the US favors positivist scholarship in the name of science. By comparison, IR is an institutional muddle, shapeless, data-poor, and intractable; comparative politics is somewhere in between. Americanists have it easiest, methodologically speaking, and they have the most to show deans and provosts, foundations, lobbyists, state legislatures, and, of course, the federal government—the sponsors and consumers of social science scholarship. Economies of scale favor "big science," even at the margins of big science. High in status, big on results, American politics has grown steadily in proportion to other fields in top departments. There is, however, a good deal more to the story. Recall that IR has always had an unusual position in political science. Rapidly coalescing after WWII in tandem with the dominance of the US in world politics, the field drew sustenance from diplomatic history and international law as well as from political scientists preoccupied with power. An interdisciplinary ethos marked the time, as registered in the founding of the International Studies Association in 1959. At that same time, a number of professional schools of international affairs got their start. Some of the most prominent were associated, more or less closely, with top-ranked political science departments, which benefitted from the custom of joint appointments; those departments have always had significantly larger contingents in IR and comparative than the top 25 norm. Nonetheless, those same contingents have competing institutional commitments. When top departments go over to positivist political science dominated by Americanists, IR scholars jointly appointed in professional schools have significant incentives to throw their lot in with the latter.

In those professional schools, regional studies have always occupied a significant place, with commensurate benefit to comparativists. Judging from my own experience, IR scholars and comparativists are not natural allies—at least not in this context. Most comparativists have regional specialties. Insofar as regional studies draw on regional expertise, disciplinary allegiances are secondary, and the way professional schools

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organize instructional fields reinforces this disposition. By contrast IR scholars find themselves doubly marginalized—in their departments and their professional schools. The obvious response to this state of affairs is to turn one's attention to foreign policy.

Needless to say, policy relevance trumps disciplinarity in these schools. *Policy* usually means American foreign policy, whether the machinery for making policy or the relation of policy to the great issues of the moment. The extent to which foreign policy studies are integral to IR as a scholarly undertaking is a tricky issue and beside the point. In the setting of a professional school, commentary on immediate policy concerns is the order of the day. Different forums commend themselves. A variety of policy bigwigs shuttle in and out; the revolving door may even beckon. Department politics matter less and less: Who cares if IR gets no respect from political scientists single-mindedly engaged in the pursuit of science? Scholars with strong methodological skills see no limit on their substantive interests. On the assumption that there is nothing substantively different about international relations, everyone can pretend that IR is covered in the department.

Yet another trend is the much-discussed decline of political theory over several decades. Obviously political theory's decline is inversely related to the rise of positivist science. To the extent political theorists respond by adopting Continental fashions in philosophy and social theory—temptations no less evident in IR—they are implicated in their own irrelevance. Unsurprisingly scholars in IR and political theory have joined forces here and there, but less so in top 25 departments, where political theory seems to be hanging on (at least this is my impression). I attribute this to the "big name" phenomenon: relatively few political theorists acquire big names as theorists, and there are just enough of these to grace the rosters of top departments.

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IR's interdisciplinary ethos has had another long-term effect undercutting the field's standing in American political science. From the beginning, undergraduate programs in international studies proliferated in small liberal arts colleges needing to pool resources across disciplines. Large universities also developed interdisciplinary programs for undergraduate students unsure of their interests. In effect, any faculty member in the arts and sciences with interests transcending frontiers or centered outside the US could teach in such programs—the more the merrier. Nonetheless, political scientists in IR and comparative politics are disproportionately likely to invest their energies in these institutionally autonomous programs, effectively pulling their attention away from their departments. Deans count enrollments in international studies programs, determine that these programs are cash cows, and use that cash to award faculty lines to student-starved liberal arts departments. IR gets less than it should in utilitarian terms, while Americanists benefit disproportionately from large pre-law programs and undergraduate majors free of IR's contamination.

Within top departments of political science, several trends help to disguise IR's attrition. One is the twinning of comparative politics and IR as fields of choice for doctoral students. This move makes sense for anyone whose first interest is IR, since there are proportionately more entry-level jobs in comparative politics. Whatever the terms of their initial appointments, these people often end up teaching more comparative than IR, and they gradually end up as comparativists. Another trend is to minimize the boundary between domestic politics and international relations, which has the effect of extending the potential range of positivist scholarship and in the process redefining turf in favor of American politics as a field.

The contrast with the rest of political science is striking. Positivist scholarship does not suit the big name phenomenon; big grants count more than big books. Americanists don't need big names to dominate departments and their rankings. Big name political theorists help by giving departments some added luster, but IR theory does not have the same luster in political science. When big names in IR leave or retire, they don't get replaced by other big names. Is there no one out there good enough to replace Waltz at Berkeley (and that was years ago) or Russett at Yale? Judging from top 25 faculty rosters, diminishing star power noticeably afflicts IR—perhaps more than the loss of entry-level lines or the disregard of journal editors. A few more retirements and IR won't matter in the slightest in the status politics of American political science.

No doubt I exaggerate. I should say again that I may, in a fit of nostalgia, have mistaken the passing of my generation for the death of the field. Perhaps I just don't know anymore who's big in IR, much less the rest of political science. There is yet one more trend to suggest otherwise. To a remarkable degree, IR has globalized. In the process, it has acquired many of the trappings of a discipline in its own right; major universities all over the world sport departments of international relations. To borrow from Hayes's contribution, scholarly sentiment outside of the US favors going between, below, and above the rationalist assumptions that outsiders see as having hobbled positivist scholarship, made it provincial, and marked it as yet another manifestation of American hegemony.

More generally, globalization has enabled sociologists and geographers spouting a few clichés about the erosion of sovereignty to mark off a good deal of what IR had, once upon time,

claimed as its own. In what I take to be a healthy response to this development, scholars in IR outside the United States are reasserting the value of interdisciplinarity and re-appropriating global "space" for themselves. They are also less afraid to normativize their scholarly concerns, in the process making international ethics a thriving global enterprise. Unfortunately, they are also inclined to dismiss positivist scholarship—IR in the American style—out of hand. This, I believe, is just as regrettable as positivist political scientists writing off any more expansive conception of what IR is about.

This is not the place to tell scholars in other parts of the world what they should do about a growing impasse, indeed a global schism. I conclude with a modest suggestion directed to members of top-ranked political science departments in the United States. Consider hiring a senior scholar in IR who is not already working in the United States. There are quite a number who, in my opinion, qualify as big names by any standard. Other disciplines do it. It would be stimulating. It might even save American IR. The constructivist community would find itself less isolated in a country and a profession proud to be tolerant, open, and pluralist in spirit. Even if the bigger story turns out badly, constructivists hunkered down in the United States can take solace in constructivism's global success, of which they are very much a part. ■

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