The "Third Debate" 25 Years Later

An International Studies Quarterly Online symposium

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INTRODUCTION

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In 1989, Yosef Lapid published an article in *International Studies Quarterly* that became a touchstone for a variety of theoretical and methodological debates in the field. "The Third Debate: On the Prospects of International Theory in a Post-Positivist Era" (click on the link below to access the original article) generated quite a bit of discussion about the potential contribution of a variety of alternative approaches to international studies, and contributed to a generally self-reflective moment in the field. Lapid's piece, although certainly not the only call for questioning the foundations and direction of the field in the post-Cold War era, managed to knit together the "Great Debates" narrative of the field's origins and development with a call for diversity and pluralism that struck a responsive chord with many.

2014 marks the 25th anniversary of the publication of that piece in *International Studies Quarterly*. To mark the occasion, this Symposium looks back at 1989 as well as looking around at the present state of international studies scholarship, and asks whether Lapid's diagnosis of the prospects of international theory have been fulfilled or frustrated a quarter of a century on. The Symposium features six contributions, to be published over the next three days:

Yosef Lapid leads off with an author's retrospective. He finds cause for "pianissimo bravos" for international theory.

Yale Ferguson and Richard Mansbach, participants in the initial "Third Debate" with an *ISQ* article of their own, come to a more pessimistic appraisal of the situation, nothing that although the "3rd Debate" helped to create diversity and openness, the resulting "post-positivist islands" of scholarship have made consensus harder to achieve.

Cynthia Weber's contribution focuses on the effect that the "Third Debate" had on critical scholarship in the field, and uses the analogy of "gentrification" to describe the process by which new theoretical constructs came to occupy the field's central concerns. Critical scholarship did not vanish, she argues, but was marginalized.

In her contribution, Helena Rytövuori-Apunen argues that Lapid's infelicitous characterization of the Third Debate as involving "positivism" and "post-positivism" unintentionally steered the debates about theory and methodology in the field in an unproductive direction. She outlines the case for a critical reconstruction of such debates along more pragmatic lines.

Richard Price provides a view from the standpoint of someone who was a Ph.D. student when Lapid's original article was published, and describes the kind of theoretical and methodological openness that he as a student felt that the piece signaled.

Finally, Annick T. R. Wibben asks specifically about the fate of feminist theory in the Third Debate and its aftermath, questioning whether notions of methodological pluralism are sufficient to make space for the challenges posed by feminists and other critical scholars.

As always, readers are welcome to join in the conversation in the comments sections under each post in the Symposium, as well as here under this main post.

25 Years after The Third Debate: Two (pianissimo) bravos for IR Theory

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I am grateful to the editors for giving me both the incentive and the opportunity to revisit my "Third Debate" article (1989) some 25 years after its publication. In the following I will look at the article in the context of the debate on the progress –or lack of progress – of the IR theory enterprise rekindled recently by publication of the "End of IR Theory " special issue (2013) of the *European Journal of International Relations*. As indicated by my title, I intend to second and even raise the ante on the optimistic spirit of the article, which concluded with only one (pianissimo) bravo for our theory enterprise. As indicated by the EJIR special issue title, many will find my reading to be hopelessly optimistic. But, in a conversation which occasionally makes reference to scholarly "bets and wagers," I will say that bets on optimism seem wiser. Optimists live longer. Besides, without implying that after 25 years the IR theory enterprise has now arrived at some unreachable "golden " destination, I will invoke Randall Jarrell's astute observation that "people who live in a golden age usually go around complaining how yellow everything looks." (1958)

Re-reading an article after a quarter of a century is bound to reveal not only strengths and contributions (whatever these may be) but also essential weaknesses and limitations, which are brought into sharper focus by the passage of time. Such is the case here, and one such limitation seems noteworthy in particular. For better or for worse, the article is routinely credited with being a key proponent of the "great debates approach" to telling the IR disciplinary story. However, the simple truth is that the article was not written with such an objective in mind. The "great debates" narrative was already solidly in place at that time and, if anything, I was a somewhat unreflective, careless (and, I must add, also explicitly hesitant) consumer of this problematic but vastly popular approach. The net result was that, by offering an alternative account under an already populated rubric (The Third Debate) I unwittingly introduced unnecessary confusion into the "great debates" story (see Brian Schmidt, 2002). In retrospect, I'm no longer sure that this was a judicious or necessary move. Arguably, the article could have achieved its stated objectives without any strong reference to (sequentially numbered) "great debates."

Moving on to the more positive territory of putative strengths and contributions I may as well start by locking horns with the still ominous "bull" (pun intended) of "metatheory." The article was deliberately framed as a "meta-theoretical" project. In addition, I attached some extravagant promissory notes regarding the many benefits that can be obtained by adding a vibrant and carefully designed meta-theoretical infrastructure to the IR theory project. A superficial look may suggest that after 25 years metatheory (defined as "second-order" analysis) has been further discredited in the IR theory context. A closer look will reveal however that, quite remarkably, in the context of generalized mainstream disdain, the discipline has somehow managed to launch and sustain a modest but vibrant metatheoretical contingent. In the aftermath of the third debate, the most that the strident (but, in my view still seriously misguided) voices advocating a strict "metatheory-avoidance"

strategy can expect is the "de-centering" (Sil and Kratochwil 2011) (as opposed to the "discarding") of metatheoretical inquiry. "De-centering" is better than "discarding" and I consider this to be sufficient progress to justify an additional "pianissimo" bravo.

Reflexivity is intimately related to metatheory, and in the article I identified its "task" as "promoting a more reflexive intellectual environment in which debate, criticism and novelty can freely circulate" (p. 250). I am not reckless enough to issue any "mission accomplished" statements in this context. Inna Hamati-Ataya (2012) is certainly on target in pointing out that IR scholarship is still awaiting a fully implemented "reflexive turn." However, I strongly agree with Stefano Guzzini (2013) who discusses the development of IR theory "as historical steps of increasing reflexivity which cannot be undone." And for me this is worth an additional bravo.

This brings us to theoretical **pluralism**. Here we find ourselves in deeply positive territory. In the article I talked about a "drift toward methodological pluralism." This drift has since morphed into a "flood" of all kinds of "pluralisms," some more productive than others. The notorious "specter" of relativism is rarely invoked and the once formidable obstacle to cross-paradigmatic communication known as Kuhnian "incommensurability" has been so utterly demolished that one finds herself secretly hoping for partial restoration. As a discipline, IR is far more pluralistic and its (metatheoretical) discussions of pluralism and its complex relation to theoretical growth are far more sophisticated and far more reflexive. To be sure, I do not expect justly disgruntled "critical" or "dissident" approaches (such as, for instance, critical theory, feminism, post-modernism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism and so on) to be satisfied with the current disciplinary situation, nor should they. But, for better or for worse, they are now a part of the pluralist disciplinary fabric of the discipline and for me this is worth far more than just one additional bravo.

Much of the above stands in need of further elaboration but there is a limit to what can be said in just 1000 words. Let me end with a question, which must be on the minds of many readers. If the discipline is in reasonable theoretical health, why do we witness all this talk about "the end of theory" with or without a question mark? The answer to this question is, of course, very complex, but my hunch is that a secret urge to become a "normal" science is still deeply rooted in the disciplinary psyche. The initial "high consensus, rapid advance" urge may have mutated into a "low consensus, rapid advance" lust, but the pace of growth is still unacceptably low for many members of the IR scholarly community. Strong and sustained therapy is needed to successfully address this insatiable urge. In this context, the article can be considered an early and moderately successful therapeutic session. Many more sessions are surely needed with new "therapists," and fortunately there are plenty of young and highly qualified candidates eager to assume this role. And incidentally, no need to worry about Dr. Lapid requesting compensation for that early therapy session. This has already happened. Dr. Lapid is a tenured professor in the Department of Government at NMSU.

REFLECTIONS ON THE "THIRD DEBATE"

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Twenty-five years have passed since Yosef Lapid published his seminal article on the "Third Debate" in *International Studies Quarterly*. That was when the Cold War was ending, and—how time flies—we were part of the IR conversation then and even as early as the 1970s. Lapid's article prompted us to describe our reaction to the Third Debate as being "between celebration and despair," (Ferguson and Mansback, 1991) that is, extremely pleased about advances in theoretical pluralism but wary about the field's becoming "hopelessly bogged down in epistemological debates" or what Richard Dawkins (1998) called "metatwaddle." All these years later, and although our own "postinternational/polities" theoretical perspective has continued to evolve, we are still of the same mind about the Third Debate.

Recall the core issue Lapid raised: Positivist theory and "scientific" method had failed to accomplish their stated objective of cumulating knowledge or even generating substantial understanding of international relations. The campaign for complete "objectivity" had failed, and striving for both theory and understanding in IR had increasingly become what we soon termed "the elusive quest." (Ferguson and Mansbach 1988) Why had it not been obvious from the start that theorists have political, professional, and intellectual interests and preferences that inevitably shape the subjects they study, the methods they employ, the meanings they attach to concepts, and the conclusions they reach? To us, it is more amazing that that message *still* hasn't gotten through to everyone—quite the contrary.

The "Third Debate" did not alter the views of the field's positivists who continue to dominate many leading departments and journals especially in the United States, although thankfully far less so in Europe. However, it did dramatically sensitize scholars, especially younger scholars, to the role of such factors as norms, identities, ideas, and principles. Part of this shift was greater appreciation of idealism and, depending upon which version of post-positivism, declining reliance on materialism. As a consequence, IR scholars other than those still wedded to narrow positivism no longer believe that "facts" speak for themselves and insist that we give greater emphasis to meaning and interpretation of events filtered through subjective lenses.

These shifts – in research and teaching – have been immensely valuable in focusing our concern upon normative and cultural issues that had been largely ignored by rigid empiricists, partly because such matters were so difficult to measure. Whether via the different strains of constructivism, English School, normative theory, critical theory, feminist theory, postmodernism, or post-colonial theory, subjective factors are receiving the attention they merit in explaining behavior and changes in patterns of interaction and conflict/cooperation in global affairs.

Greater emphasis on interpretation and normative issues has made "agency" more salient and highlighted the limits of "structural" perspectives like neorealism. Moreover, stressing agency has undermined the assumed immutability of IR in neorealist theory, restored an interest in how and why things change in the world around us, and brought about renewed interest in the role of history and historical analysis. It has allowed for a past and a future

even as it has made for a less parsimonious present and, incidentally, has answered Huntington's contention (1971) that "change is a problem for social scientists."

Alas, what the Third Debate failed to establish is the degree to which theorists who strive for balance and as much objectivity as possible can communicate and argue about contradictory interpretations of phenomena in a meaningful way. In this regard, the Third Debate unfortunately rather distracted the field from the central drive for "better" theory—that is, in our view, "practical" theory that tries to explain important events, trends, and outcomes that shape our lives and threaten our wellbeing and survival.

Diversity in theoretical perspectives is a virtue and we must acknowledge that *all* theory is at root *a construction*, but it is possible to carry intellectual fragmentation, navel-gazing introspection, holier-than-thou "critical" correction, philosophical "unpacking" of concepts, postmodern-speak, and nit-picking about mental abstractions too far. At some point what we risk is an ivory-tower effete debate about very little of consequence.

In sum, the Third Debate happily encouraged diversity and its insights pointed up the palpable failure—no less today than back then--of rigid positivism and the measurement fetish. But instead of consensus and the pragmatic analysis of global affairs, one unintended and rather pitiful result of the Third Debate has been a proliferation of incommensurable post-positivist islands. Quite apart from the gate-keeper empiricists, we have subsequently moved from belated tolerance of diversity to an attitude of "anything goes." Robert Cox (1981) famously observed that "theory is always for someone and for some purpose." And one unfortunate result of the Third Debate was to foster some perspectives that reflect thinly-veiled ideological posturing rather than a genuine search for understanding. Worse, we believe, some are even less substantial than that.

We suggest that the Third Debate should now simply be regarded as part of the history of our IR field, and we henceforth need to move on to a Fourth and even Fifth Debate. The Fourth Debate would ask us to accept concepts as "mere" constructs, straightforwardly define the terms we use, and get on with the task of trying to decide how best to use theory to address perceived "real-world" concerns. Certainly the primary aim would not be to speak to policy-makers in their many public and private institutional settings, because we know from experience that most of them will surely remain too caught up in their traditional assumptions and day-to-day deadlines to listen. However, if we IR scholars were to offer them genuinely useful information and interpretations—couched in language free of pretentious jargon—perhaps we might occasionally find ourselves (here it comes) "relevant." Certainly our students and the general public would find our work much more interesting to read.

So the Fourth Debate should be about how best to use theory in a "practical" fashion to shine more light on important matters in global affairs. Part of the task must be to continue to refine some of the traditional IR perspectives and especially to bring more than one of them to bear on particular problems—different theories illuminate different aspects of "reality." In due course, this should lead quite naturally to a Fifth (renewed) Debate about the future role of "grand theory." Both strict empiricists and those theorists of a more subjective inclination have increasing come to assume that our only hope lies in "middle-range" theories. Overwhelmed by the sheer complexity of the world we are trying so desperately to understand, we have sadly lost our grandiose ambitions.

The Gentrification of International Theory

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Writing 'on the prospects of international theory in a post-positivist era', Yosef Lapid suggested that 'enhanced reflectivity' was 'the notable contribution' of what he called the Third Debate between positivist and post-positivist IR scholars (1989: 235). Twenty-five years later, some IR scholars claim the discipline's theoretical and methodological pluralism as both the legacy of the Third Debate and as evidence of IR on-going 'enhanced reflectivity'. I disagree with this contemporary assessment. For rather than evidencing 'an intellectual environment in which debate, criticism, and novelty can freely circulate' (Lapid, 1989: 250) – which is Lapid's definition of 'enhanced reflectivity' – international theorizing since the Third Debate has undergone a kind of 'gentrification' that curtails 'enhanced reflectivity'.

'Gentrification' – which describes 'the influx of middle-class people to cities and neighborhoods, displacing lower-class worker residents' – seems to have nothing to do with IR. Yet Sarah Schulman's analysis of her NYC East Village neighborhood shows how the gentrification of neighborhoods also gentrifies ideas, leading to 'the gentrification of the mind' (2012).

Schulman describes gentrification as the replacement of mix with homogeneity while pretending difference and privilege do not exist. The 'regeneration' of 'failing' neighborhoods displaces poor, multi-ethnic residents in favor of wealthy, white ones. A 'reculturalization' of neighborhoods and the ideas that circulate in them follows gentrifiers, who protect themselves from the 'difference' in which they now live by clustering in gated communities and adapting 'excessive differences' to their milder tastes. Blandness overtakes boldness, and privilege becomes omnipresent but invisible (Schulman, 2012: 27, 34).

My claim (elaborated in Weber 2014) is that the gentrification of critical IR theories – including post-positivist theories – allows so-called mainstream IR theorists to claim they practice 'enhanced reflectivity' *only because* gentrification changes the meaning of 'enhanced reflectivity' into something that bears little resemblance to what Lapid described twenty-five years ago. This is because what Schulman observed in her NYC neighborhood parallels the theoretical gentrification of IR over the past twenty-five years, where the 'wrong' kinds of theoretical, epistemological, and methodological mix were replaced with what became new forms of mainstream/dominant homogeneity while pretending that difference and privilege did not exist or while pretending that the blander brands of difference supported by the discipline evidenced IR's critical theoretical edge.

To make sense of this argument, think of the discipline of IR Lapid was writing about twenty-five years ago as a city in which various IR theories inhabited different neighborhoods. IR's upscale neighborhoods were populated by mainstream theories like (Neo)Realism and (Neo)Idealism, while downscale neighborhoods were populated by intellectual immigrants into IR (Marxisms, feminisms, queer theories, critical race theories, postcolonialisms, and poststructuralisms) who lived together in a kind of pre-gentrified

NYC East Village, where they wielded far less disciplinary capital (e.g., in publishing and employment) than did their upscale colleagues.

Just after Lapid's publication of 'The Third Debate', the discipline was caught off guard by the end of the Cold War. This had the unlikely effect of transforming the East Village of IR into a go-to location for upscale IR theorists seeking out new theoretical and methodological insights that might rescue the discipline. Their visits put downscale/critical IR on upscale IR's map as an up-and-coming area, thus raising the disciplinary capital of some critical IR scholars and generating 'enhanced reflectivity' within the discipline. Yet over the years, upscale IR scholars increasingly viewed their engagements with downscale/critical IR as incommensurable, non-productive, hostile and dangerous (eg., Holsti, 1985; Keohane, 1989 and in reply Weber, 1994). This lead them to brand downscale/critical IR as failing the discipline because it detracted from IR's disciplinary goals (Keohane, 1998).

Once downscale/critical IR was dubbed a failure, it was 'regenerated' by upscale IR. Employing the gentrification toolkit, upscale IR sought to replaced downscale/critical IR's mix with mainstream/dominant homogeneity. Some upscale IR scholars moved into this edgy neighborhood. As their numbers reached a (non)critical mass, institutional authorities took notice and amended publishing and hiring strategies that effectively re-zoned this outlying turf as central to disciplinary regeneration.

Some saw this as a boost for downscale/critical IR. Yet it came with costs. For example, the hard, troubling, political edges of critical IR were substituted with softer, more soothing critiques of upscale IR that left critical politics behind. A generalized international political economy was offered as a gentrified IR replacement for Marxism (Strange, 1988), 'the gender variable' for feminism (Jones, 1996; in reply see Carver, Cochran, and Squires, 1998), constructivism for poststructuralism (Wendt, 1992), 'the clash of civilizations' for critical race and postcolonial studies (Huntington, 1993), and 'soft power' in the service of state power for cultural critique (Nye, 2004).

Critical IR traditions did not disappear. Rather, they were pushed off what was becoming some of the discipline's prime real estate and beyond the barricades of upscale IR's newly-erected gated communities (e.g., top journals, upscale ISA panels). This made critical IR's status in the discipline all the more precarious, making toned-down gentrified versions of critical IR ideas that promised to transform the discipline on mainstream IR's terms (e.g., Wendt's Realist, statist constructivism 1999) but not on critical IR's terms all the more seductive to gentrifiers and gentrified alike. This solidified the 'hypnotic identification with authority' (Schulman, 2012: 34) gentrifiers and their gentrified followers experienced, as they became the new authorities within a mainstream IR that saw itself as just critical *enough*.

Over these past twenty-five years, there has been little critical self-reflection by gentrifiers and their gentrified followers about how disciplinary privilege and power enable and sustain IR's theoretical living arrangements, pass off the by-products of gentrification like intellectual gated communities as evidence of a pluralism that promotes 'enhanced reflectivity', insulate the discipline from internal critique, and take meaningful change off political, social, and disciplinary agendas. Investigating how IR protected itself against the extensive transformations the Third Debate made possible goes some way toward remedying this. It also might yield valuable lessons for future generations of critical international theorists whose forthcoming theoretical innovations might interest *and threaten* upscale IR enough for the discipline to designate their downscale theories as future areas for gentrification.

"POST-POSITIVISM" AND THE REAL "ORTHODOXY"

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By casting the past of the field of international relations as "positivist," Lapid's 1989 article elides important parts of the historical discourse and thus narrows the possibilities of self-understanding in the field. When we consider, however, that his article epitomizes the critical discussion of the late 1980s and early 1990s, this assessment may not seem fair. My apology here is that if he had elaborated upon his analytical and interpretative starting points, we might have gained a more adequate understanding of "orthodoxy" in the field. Lapid certainly paved the way for a more substantive analysis of the body of research; but unfortunately his suspicion that "systematic reconstruction" (Giddens 1979) can mean a "new orthodoxy" prevented him from taking more decisive steps in this direction.

Referring to the works of Holton (1987) and Wisdom (1987), Lapid speaks of three axes of portraying scientific knowledge ("paradigmatism"): "phenomenic" (empirical content), "analytic" (hypothesis, explanations, models), and "thematic". The thematic axis includes "metaphysical" ingredients ranging from reality-defining assumptions and ideology to epistemological premises. A more detailed elaboration of this last-mentioned axis in its ontological problematic in connection with the "perspectivist" task (which additionally includes epistemological and axiological questions) could have facilitated "systematic reconstruction" in a sense which also keeps in mind that "[p]erspectivism can play a constructive role only in so far as it acknowledges the historic and dynamic character of cognitive schemes and assumptive frameworks" (Lapid, 1989: 248). If Lapid, instead of focusing on mainly "paradigmatism", had more substantively articulated how "perspectivism" connects with his third theme, i.e. the need to demonstrate the "relativism" of the discourse that reproduces the meta-scientific units, he might have had the means to also relativize his own assumptions about the dominance of positivism in the field.

In the more general sense, my point is that a deeper awareness of the history of the discipline could have helped the critical researchers of those days to recognize that the argument about the reign of a "positivist orthodoxy", which was imported from the discussions in sociology, never held true for the study of international relations in any way comparable to sociology. In 1989 the empiricist (positivist) ideal had already been largely given up and replaced with the recognition that scientific rationality is a norm of the research community. This "sociological" wisdom had emerged from the Kuhnian wave of discussions and was convenient in the epistemic void it had left behind. By the mid 1980s, the "interparadigm debate" had confirmed the identity of the field as mutually contending perspectives (presented as theory frameworks) on the empirical world. Because the epistemic bases of this contention were also contested, the threat of "orthodoxy" lay in the reliance on convention in the research community. Concepts and frameworks become so predominant that they, a priori and as "concept labels", defined research problems. Such predominance of the concept is even manifest in the identity of the field as a series of

established debates and schools, "named" with capital letters, e.g. Neorealism or Neoliberalism. In individual research, the predominance of the concept means that research problems represent (symbolize) schools and approaches rather than emerge from the researcher's reflections and encounters with the domain of study. "Post-positivism" arguably meant to critique all this; but it was an unhappy choice of term.

In hindsight, it is easy to notice that the inspiration which generated the new wave of criticism in 1989 arose through the disciplinary connection which also previously, then in the form of the scientific study of behavior, had shown the way for International Studies. The positivist idea about "unified science" appeared in a new guise when sociology, now turned into social theory, once again was looked at as the source of development. This background convention explains why it mattered so little to ask how the claim about "positivist orthodoxy" applied to the historical body of research in our field, and why it, consequently, was not clear if positivism was used as a metaphor of unreflective attitudes or as an argument about methodology. In the last-mentioned sense positivism, in the form of empiricism, is only a thin strand of discourse on both sides of the North Atlantic. (Rytövuori-Apunen, 2005)Because post-*positivism* was more a construction of the mind than an argument about a historical discourse, it left a narrow understanding of the field. Surely such excesses of the "celebratory" moment were not Lapid's alone—and they were yet to come, not least in the joy of "poststructuralist" play with the duality of semantic meaning and the freedom of interpretation assumed in "social construction".

In these developments, early realism was deformed in two ways; first by behavioralist study which, with a strong input from peace research, cast it as mental setup and attitudinal disposition, and second by making it serve legitimization of great power policies. Academic research, at that time occupied with establishing new conventions with the "neo"-prefix, showed little concern about these developments, and the impact of the "traditionalists" remained embedded and invisible to discussants such as Lapid, who made far too sweeping generalizations about the field being "positivist". Lapid, who in 1989 opened all windows to the future but, with the argument that the new moment was post-*positivist,* veiled the way back, contributed to maintaining a collective blind spot about a more persistent "orthodoxy". But, as mentioned, the predicament is not fair to the individual writer. The discourse in our field was not yet receptive for a "practice turn" which could help us see that systematic reconstruction need not be a step towards a new "orthodoxy", if we remain critical of the predominance of any research convention — and can systematically reconstruct the field in ways that hold to epistemological realism without privileging empiricism (Rytövuori-Apunen, 2014 illustrates this argument with examples).

The Good Debate

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It is a genuine pleasure to reflect upon Yosef Lapid's "Third Debate" article. I remember all too well finding it an exciting cutting-edge piece that spoke to me as a Ph.D. student, and around which I oriented some of my own ruminations in a paper on funky new approaches for my core graduate seminar in International Relations. That paper, as I look back, pivotally helped me work out my own intellectual place, and for that I've always been grateful for Lapid's article which helped sort out in its very clear language a maelstrom of intellectual ferment. In the spirit of the piece, I didn't deploy the conventional methodology of re-reading the article itself to then reflect upon how well its analysis and arguments have held up. Rather, as enjoined by the Symposium editor (my way of ducking blame if this strikes any readers as too solipsistic), this is a more personal reflection by a scholar who followed some of the paths charted by Lapid's piece among others. My method here instead then has been to first engage in the archival research of finding my hand-written notes taken when I first engaged the article - miraculously an empirical success. I have then used those notes as a springboard to reflect upon what I found so critical then and how well those beacons of attraction hold up today as having proven salient, and pondering a few implications of what has come to pass or not.

My first reflection is to recognize that there are far more proclamations of game-changing new approaches, of being in a pivotally unique time, and so on, than in hindsight live up to the billing. Every era likes to think they are at least a little bit special. Even being self-conscious of that tendency, I am struck that the very fact of this symposium provides some external validation to my sense then that Lapid's proclamation was at the threshold of a new era. His clearly was a diagnosis of major intellectual currents that indeed challenged and subsequently changed the look of the discipline. This is not to say that the orthodoxies against which the meta-theoretical and other innovations were arrayed have gone away, but neither was that Lapid's contention; rather he argued that the end of the hegemony of a particular positivist consensus was nigh. There have been and will continue to be plenty of analyses of the extent to which such an alleged intellectual flowering has in fact really delivered greater post-positivist reflexivity, theoretical or methodological tolerance, and diversity as reflected in such metrics as hiring practices, the content of top-ranked journals, and the like.

While averse to making too much in the way of such pontifications here (after all, they will not have been tested and are but my interpretations) I would hazard to observe that it has been clear that one of the chief analytical constructs to emerge from Lapid's 'third debate' – what has come to be known as constructivism – is a (if not *the*) chief contender in English-language IR debates to what has developed out of the positivist orthodoxy to be known (however accurately) as rationalism. Notably, there has not been a 'fourth debate' since of

comparable scope across the methodological, theoretical and epistemological fronts but rather relatively more contained exchanges within those domains.

Among the sortings out of the debates chronicled by Lapid has been the advent of methodological pluralism. This has cut several ways, however. An increasingly common format of Ph.D. dissertations at least in their North American variety (depending of course upon the research question), is for multi-method research designs that might have a large-N overview followed by case studies to tease out the causal or constitutive relations suggested by correlations. While on the one hand one could say this fosters diversity insofar as quantitatively oriented scholars are pulled to engage in more contextualized analysis, to the extent such multi-method designs become an expectation it conversely means that those who favour close contextual (including more interpretive) work may be judged lacking if they do not themselves also employ quantitative methods, re-asserting the influence of post-positivist positivism albeit in a different guise. But if one really believes in the value of intellectual diversity rather than just championing it instrumentally to create a space for one's own preferred approach, then such an incarnation of perspectivism might be seen as a salutary outgrowth of the currents diagnosed and encouraged by Lapid, so long as it is utilized appropriately. One might see that development as something of a co-optation of qualitative methods by quantitative, though more generously a multi-perspectival analysis to a single subject matter would seem to be consistent with the pluralist epistemological underpinnings diagnosed by Lapid.

The call for a more reflexive intellectual environment announced a key task, but realizing this has proven challenging and even elusive. Increased intellectual diversity methodologically has also meant specialization and increased sophistication into silos. The deeper down those drill, the more difficult it is to communicate with others outside. I might liken this to the proliferation of languages – while it creates a richer and more varied environment, the ability to engage in genuine communication across them becomes a rare talent, and the community increasingly fractured.

Finally, while Lapid was generally optimistic about the intellectual gains of methodological pluralism, he warned that a set of guiding assumptions – if elevated – may lead to excessive preoccupation with marginal problems. The shift of attention to the explicitness of assumptions and their implications that characterized the third debate for Lapid has not proven to be sustained, insofar as it is all too common an experience to listen to a job talk – whether from a modeler or critical theorist or some other - that exhibits that preoccupation with rather marginal questions which are pursued as the mountain was climbed - 'because it was there.' To justify work as dealing with important problems requires a normative defense, yet normative international relations theory still has tended to take a back seat to empirical work, even as both are intimately informed by the other.

Combined with the ongoing calls for engaged scholars and scholarship, a debate about which has yet again erupted recently, these two forces lend strong direction towards reigning in the relevance of nonetheless necessary theoretical and methodological sophistication and specialization. Calls for relevant scholarship have long been there, but perhaps are accentuated today with the variety of contemporary opportunities afforded by social media including blogs like this. While this was not something that Lapid was in a position to foresee, it is a terrain that in many respects is entirely facilitative of many of the currents he diagnosed, even as it is not without its own hazards and challenges. In that sense, Lapid's analysis might have been even more before his time than my own original engagement could possibly have appreciated.

LOOK WHO'S TALKING

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In 1989, Yosef Lapid proposed that post-positivist optimism was to be found in the "move toward relativism and methodological pluralism" (246). One has to wonder - was his optimism justified? Lapid claimed that the new tolerance for varied alternative epistemologies produced "an exceptional 'opening up' of international theory" (246) and rendered all versions of methodological monism suspect. Yet, twenty-five years later the declaration "this is unscientific" can still strike fear in the heart of an IR scholar.

More recently, Patrick Jackson (2011) again makes the case for methodological pluralism in IR. He presents a fourfold classification of approaches (neo-positivist, critical realist, analyticist and reflexivist) that are distinguished by the relationship between knower and known, yet all of which are deemed equally scientific. Ann Tickner, who has long attempted to facilitate engagements between feminist scholars and the IR mainstream, draws on Jackson to counter "IR's frequent dismissal of [feminist] scholarship deemed unscientific" (2011: 616). She proposes that the implication of methodological pluralism is that "we must all accept that it is not permissible to judge one methodology by standards of evaluation suitable for another" (617). This might be so, but there is more at stake here than awareness of different methodological standards.

Rather than successfully displace positivism, methodological pluralism has effected little change. Methodological pluralism – where a variety of approaches are tolerated – makes life a little more bearable for those at the margins, but does not fundamentally challenge power relations in IR. Instead, IR has tamed disagreement by separating into camps, each with their own way of delimiting and doing IR (Sylvester 2007, 2013). The discipline has yet to take seriously the challenges posed by feminist, post-structuralist and post-colonial scholars that implicate some of the central ideas and practices of IR scholars in creating and maintaining global injustices.

Any attempt at classification invariably produces silences, but it is important to note which silences are produced and what their effects are (what Gayatri Spivak called epistemic violence in 1988). While Lapid's development of the post-positivist profile in three acts – paradigmatism, perspectivism, and relativism – impresses with its ability to cut across a broad set of engagements, the elegance also obscures his oversights. Taking seriously "that meaning and understanding are not intrinsic to the world but, on the contrary, are continuously constructed, defended, and challenged" (Lapid, 1989: 242) it becomes necessary to carefully dissect his presentation. Closely examining what he excludes, and how the 3rd debate has consequently been narrated, provides insights into the constitution of IR as a discipline. We can detect in the silences that shape this particular epistemic community what is at stake – not just then, but today as well.

What is at stake is "the power to define and lay claim to normality" (Dunn, 2008: 52) and to set the terms of the debate(s). It is striking that positivists assume a scientist who is unidentified or disembodied – a knowing subject without an identity. Yet, isn't the classic IR scholar, indeed almost every single person cited by Lapid, a white man? As Kevin Dunn (2008) points out, "it is important to recognize that the current academic discipline is built upon a foundation of white male privilege and that the process of privilege remains an

active element in how the discipline continues to be structured, reproduced, taught and practiced" (51). This is no trivial matter: If those theorizing are men only, "what is male becomes the basis of the Abstract, the Essential and the Universal, while what is female becomes accidental, different, other" (Thiele, 1986: 35).

Asking these questions has political implications: Paying attention to who is doing the talking "allows us to become answerable for what we see"(Haraway, 1988: 583). The question of normality, of a shared understanding of the world, is central to feminist interventions (as well as postcolonial scholarship, e.g.Agathangelou & Ling, 2009, Blaney & Inayatullah, 2003, Chowdry & Nair, 2002). Recognizing that these forces fundamentally frame the international, feminist scholars (who are notably absent in Lapid's account) reject many of the parameters of IR. Their insistence of the particular, anchored in the commitment to theorizing on the basis of (women's) everyday experience (cf. Enloe, 2004), inevitably provides for a different understanding of global politics (Wibben, 2011).

These interventions also have methodological implications – "feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object" (Haraway, 1988: 583) – but they are primarily political. When the personal is political, "women's subjectivities and experiences of everyday life become the site of the redefinition of patriarchal meanings and values and of resistance to them" (Weedon, 1987: 5-6). Since "most of *us*, most of the time, reproduce gender, class, race, and countless other relations of domination unreflectingly" (Peterson 1992: 38) situating oneself and the subject of study is a priority in challenging existing power structures (cf. Wibben, 2004).

Disagreements in IR, often framed as debates about methodology, are actually debates about politics. This can be hard to see within the broadly positivist framework that still dominates IR. While there is "little in the way of a discussion of what positivism actually means" (Smith, 1996: 16), IR separatesscience and politics in a way that cannot be upheld in practice. The production of knowledge and its modalities (science and scientists) are intrinsic to the social, symbolic, and political order and never free from its dimensions. The division of knowledge and politics has consequences of a different kind: it *represents* science *as though* it is clearly divided from politics and thus provides a legitimacy that seems to rest on a foundation other than authority (Wibben 2004, 2011). Ironically, "science *is* value-neutral in the dangerous epistemological and social sense that it is porous, transparent to the moral and political meanings that structure its conceptual schemes and methodologies" (Harding, 1986: 238). These political debates have not been resolved.

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